



CONSTANCE



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BY

THERESE BENTZAN

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TRANSLATED BY

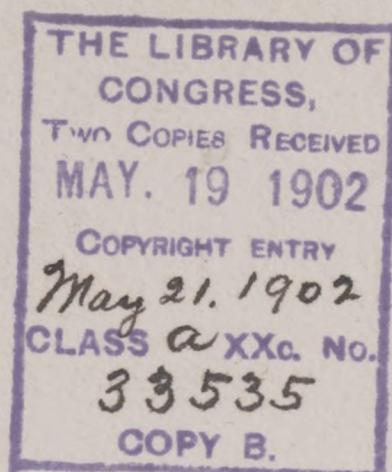
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CONSTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

NEARLY ten years elapsed since a placard nailed upon the wall separating the Park from the Oak Forest had borne the following inscription:

ESTATE FOR SALE.

Undivided, or in lots.

Address, Rev. Monsieur Duranton.

Rue Sully, Nerac.

The words were gradually growing faded and dim from long exposure to the wintry rains and the ardent summer suns, and yet the old Chartrreuse had found no purchaser.

The peasants, like so many greedy ants devouring their prey, had gradually divided among themselves the few acres of loam land pertaining to the estate, which lay as a boundary, keenly traced by the hand of Nature, between the fertile meadows on the one hand and the opposing land of Albret. But the chateau, desolately dilapidated, remained to

M. Duranton, whose financial circumstances precluded all possibility of his occupying it, and whose religious duties, moreover, necessitated his residing in the village.

No one, apparently, would permit himself the luxury of being tempted by the superb iron gates, nor yet the terrace, commanding as it did, a magnificent view of the infinitely multiplied vineyards and greenly carpeted slopes of the Gelise.

Although the Chartreuse of the bourgeoisie is not a remarkably imposing structure, consisting, at best, of a ground floor, surmounted by a gabled roof, with quaint dormer windows; still it might be said that the stretch of façade with its five windows was not lacking in a certain grandeur in the eyes of the unpretentious inhabitants of the village and surrounding rural districts; they preferred to wait stoically until it should for the most part fall into ruins, and then buy what was left of it.

The weeds grew in random profusion, choking the modest decorative effort of the little pedestal near by, and the tendrils of the climbing ivy entwined themselves in peaceful security about the closed blinds.

During the lifetime of Madame Nougarede (the mother of Madame Duranton), the long stone steps had been adorned with the brightness of blooming plants, but now, alas, they, too, fell under the ban of lamentable sadness and desolation.

Unfortunately, Madame left no heritage beyond this one estate, and her son-in-law had neither time nor inclination to devote to it, nor yet the wherewithal to maintain it.

His parish was extensive, and beside his five sons, he had several pupils, who afforded abundant distraction for him in his spare moments—not to mention his taste for certain subjects totally foreign to agriculture; namely, poetry and archæology.

His absorbing ambition lay in an authentic re-establishment of the antiquities of Nerac,—for they had been sadly compromised by certain frauds, of which even the most competent judges had been dupes. He had drawn up a document upon the destruction of the Gallo-Roman villa, with the causes which led up to it; which had been heartily approved by the Archæological Congress. He was, as well, an ardent advocate of the “Mosaics,” discovered upon the banks of the Gelise; they had even inspired him to write a sonnet, that sparkled among the poetical flowers which M. Fangere-Dubourg (a learned and witty Gascon,) had woven into a wreath rivaling that of Julie.

It would have been difficult to count the numerous sonnets, quatrains, epithalamiums and rhymes of which Reverend M. Duranton had been guilty, despite the overplus of duties with which he struggled valiantly. Scarcely anything transpired in his parish, but he was requested to use it as a theme for a few poetical lines.

He was wont to seek his inspiration amid the groves and shrubbery of the Park, harking to the requiem of nature’s songsters, the while silently lamenting Madame Duranton’s resolve to convert the trees into salable logs. She was a rude crusader against the superfluous, and saw little beyond the interests of the Church and her immediate

family. It was not difficult to foretell that the pastor's determination to maintain the forest intact would eventually be overcome, lest he be accused of too great a yearning toward the vanities of the earth, and of being less firm in goodly virtue than his wife, whose name was at once an example and terror to the entire community.

His esthetic tastes found their only echo in his daughter Henriette, who exulted in the useless beauties of Nature even more extravagantly than he,—for which shortcoming her mother chastised her with Calvinistic rigor.

However, Henriette's complicity in favor of the menaced Dryads (as the pastor would doubtless have expressed it in his eclogues) failed of its purpose. Negotiations were pending with a contractor for the purchase of the wood, but fortunately, as it chanced, the sale remained uncompleted when the long prayed for, but scarce expected miracle came to pass.

A purchaser for the park presented himself. Henriette, who possessed a mind ever fertile in imaginative resource, upon her first glimpse of him set him down as a nabob from no less a place than Paris itself.

As it happened, Madame Duranton was paying her daily round of visits to the sick of the parish, and the one maid of the household was absent in quest of the daily provisions, leaving only Mlle. Henriette to open the door to this providential messenger.

The Duranton domicile was in old Nerac, near the bridge whose imposing feudal architecture, stately and picturesque, unites the old and new

portions of the town. This home, be it said, was merely remarkable for its habitual disorder, industriously maintained by a troop of mischievous youngsters; M. Duranton's study alone escaped the general turbulence, and here Henriette escorted the stranger—her heart palpitating with emotion mingled with a touch of vexation at being caught in a morning negligé. She listened attentively to the explanation of the stranger's visit, then ran to the schoolroom where her father was laboring over the morning's duties.

"Go quickly," she whispered; "a prince as beautiful as the day has come to purchase the Park."

The pastor, greatly confused by this unlooked-for occurrence, arose precipitately, unmindful of the unfinished lesson, and heedless of the scarce suppressed joy this occurrence elicited from his pupils.

He hurriedly shook himself into his newest ecclesiastical frock, and nervously patted down the grey wig which his distraught fingers were constantly pushing back from his broad, olive countenance, which was less distingué than frank and sympathetic.

Hastily buttoning his coat awry, still flurried over the news, he entered the room where awaited the "prince as beautiful as the day," of whom Henriette had spoken. Prince,—perhaps—but beautiful?—from whence hail the ideas of foolish little lassies? He bowed low, with a nervous, questioning smile upon his lips. An instant later M. de Glenne had graciously introduced himself, explaining that having been desirous of visiting this corner of the Midi for some time, he had taken

this opportunity, as he returned from a tour through Spain; a chance walk had taken him in the vicinity of the Park. He had, it developed, long desired to possess a cottage somewhere in the midst of a forest far from the traveled highways.

"These fancies come to most townsmen," he added, "but few attain to a realization of them; perhaps I shall be an exception, if we can come to an understanding.—The location pleases me very much; I should be as exempt from the burden of social neighbors as Robinson Crusoe."

"Certainly, if you choose to turn your face forestward," replied M. Duranton, a trifle shocked to hear the Chartreuse (the pride of his wife's ancestors) spoken of as a cottage. "The district of Nerac is thickly settled; while the town is ten miles distant, we have within thirty minutes' walk a village possessing certain resources your family may not disdain. The ladies——"

"I have no family," interrupted M. de Glenne; "I live alone."

"Really? Are you not afraid that——"

"That I shall be lonely? I shall not remain long enough at a time for that."

"Then you will superintend the repairs;—direct the workmen, an occupation always absorbing," said M. Duranton hastily, to cover his blunder.

"Oh, I shall leave the little bicoque its air of desolation, as far as is compatible with comfort—the desolation enhances its charm; for me—I shall do merely what I consider indispensable."

"If you are fond of hunting," persisted M. Duranton, determined to disarm such indifference, "you will find the ring doves very numerous about

here; that will afford you some recreation during September and March."

"Yes," said the Parisian, with a disdainful grimace, "I presume they trap them by the dozen; for the very reason that I am a sportsman, that sort of thing could have very little attraction for me."

"Here," thought M. Duranton, "is certainly a very difficult person to please." However, he continued to enumerate the advantages and conveniences of the place until his interlocutor interrupted him again with a smile, saying:

"Perhaps you anticipate asking me a very high price?"

The amount ventured timidly transformed the smile into a frank laugh.

"Very good. I see I may humor my caprice; you say there is a village very near here?"

"Quite an important one about three miles distant. You can find anything in the way of provisions, and more, an excellent physician, my brother-in-law, Dr. Vidal,—you may perhaps have heard of him? No? Then you cannot have been long about here, for I am not boastful in saying he has a widespread reputation as a man of talent, a student withal. But pardon me, I am transgressing. The village boasts a great attraction in its church, a sixteenth century relic. Are you a Catholic, Monsieur?"

"I am not a Protestant," was the evasive answer.

M. Duranton doubtless appeared very inquisitive; it is a provincial habit, and strongly accen-

tuated in the Midi, but accompanied the while by such simplicity it rarely offends.

"Will you instruct your notary to prepare the deeds at once?" said M. de Glenne, after a momentary pause.

"Immediately!" cried M. Duranton, who until he heard these decisive words had been pursued by the fear that his purchaser was simply a delusion. "Immediately. I beg of you, Monsieur, to favor me once more with your name."

He was presented with a visiting card, which bore the name of Raoul de Glenne, and a Parisian address quite lost upon M. Duranton, who had visited that city but upon one memorable occasion, when his mind was scarcely in a receptive frame.

"De Glenne—de Glenne," he repeated mechanically, seeking to collect his thoughts; suddenly he passed his fingers through his hair with an air of satisfaction.

"That article upon Montluc, two—perhaps three years ago, very remarkable. Are you perchance related to its author?"

"You are very flattering, I am sure; I am the author."

"Ah! Why, you are almost a neighbor!" cried the pastor, stretching forth his hand. "There was a superb page upon the battle, or rather the butchery of Logatere. . . I venture to say you were quite near here, in visiting your battlefield. My compliments, Monsieur; it was written by a soldierly hand."

"I was a soldier; I began my career in the army, unfortunately, by defeat and captivity."

"Prisoner in Germany?" asked the pastor, whose

curiosity was readily aroused; M. de Glenne turned away without replying, and a shadow of suffering passed over his expressive features.

"I, too, have a drop of soldier blood in me; my father retired from service as a captain; but the services he rendered the government might readily have been envied by a superior officer; vain titles to glory that availed us little," he added sadly, in his turn.

"I should fancy the honor of it might suffice," said M. de Glenne dryly.

"Certainly, certainly," stammered the pastor, confused at having explained himself so poorly; "I intended to say that. My sister was reared at St. Denis, like the daughter of a *legionnaire*; it was she who married the Dr. Vidal of whom I spoke a moment ago."

"Ah!" said M. de Glenne, indifferently rolling a cigarette. "When do you think we can sign the deeds?"

"If you wish it, we can go together to M. Larose," responded the pastor precipitately, still afraid his prey would escape him.—"A moment; I will be with you at once."

He ran to the schoolroom, where the boys, engaged in a game of tag, were surprised in the very midst of it, having tumbled the chairs in every direction, and stood anticipating their punishment; but M. Duranton was oblivious to everything, absorbed entirely in the approaching transaction.

"Very well, boys, very well," he said, with an air of distraction. "Run away now. We have had

work enough for this morning. You may return at two."

As he hurriedly descended the stairs with his hat slouched over his face, he encountered his wife, who was returning home with that air of compunction born of Biblical readings at the bedside of the parish sick.

"I have sold the Park," he whispered triumphantly in her ear.

"What! from one hour to the next, without consulting me?"

"I could not allow the opportunity to escape, my dear."

"I presume you sold it for a song?" she queried anxiously.

"Why, for the amount we agreed upon only yesterday," he replied, now a little troubled in his turn.

"You are a fool, my dear—worse even. We agreed upon leaving it at that price rather than keep it, . . . but first you should——"

"Bah, there is no remedy for it now," and he continued his hasty course downward, four steps at a time, while she muttered peevishly:

"You will never understand business—never!"

Madame's growing anger found occasion at once to expend itself, for pushing open the school-room door, she perceived at a glance the havoc of the morning.

"Ah, you shall be punished for this!" she cried to the urchins who scattered wildly in every direction. Seizing the ruler she so frequently employed with disastrous results, she vented her spleen upon Louison (her youngest son) in default

of the others who had been fortunate enough to make good their escape; he now beheld his evil genius leading him upon the scene to suffer for the pranks of his companions, in which, as it chanced, he had not participated.

Meanwhile, the pastor hurried M. de Glenne to the office of M. Larose, bragging ceaselessly the while upon the capital of Albret—from its chateau and its rabbits, to its library and museum, even eulogizing its famous earthen pots; with numerous commentaries upon his reasons for advocating the ethnology of Necronis agæ as against the Ner. ag. of M. de Villeneuve-Bargemonth, which he held so unjustifiable.

CHAPTER II.

ALMOST at the same moment a cab drew up before the street entrance of the Duranton home, the façade of which was not without a certain resemblance to the Hotel Sully, of which it might at one time have been a dependence.

The cab reeking with yellow mud (of which the low lands were so prodigal after a rain), was driven by an old man in a coarse, blue woolen shirt and cap, more *maitre de fiacre* than coachman. A young girl of delicate brunette type, with the essential large black eyes, alighted hurriedly. Madame Duranton appeared in the doorway to greet her.

"Is your father not coming for *dejeuner*?" she questioned, upon seeing her alone.

"Another disappointment; Auntie la Pistolere is ill, dangerously so; he cannot leave her."

"How unfortunate; I had prepared a *dejeuner* exactly to his taste."

"You know it is useless to count upon him with any certainty," the young woman replied, as, laying aside her hat, she uncovered an abundance of glossy black hair, a fitting crown for her regular type of beauty.

Mlle. Vidal was a charming creature; the simplicity of her apparel might have been inspired by the most consummate coquetry, it suited her so perfectly; the coarsest of materials draped upon her were equivalent to a statue of the renaissance.

She was of the Grecian type, with gracious mannerisms and spiritual expression. Her contempt for dress, however, had nothing premeditated in it, as those who knew her best could attest; it arose merely from her secluded country life with a father who considered her beautiful enough without the addition of gaudy apparel.

"The doctor would have been doubly welcome this morning, with his practical advice, for goodness knows your uncle is sadly in need of it when it comes to defending his interests," said Madame Duranton; "he has sold the Park."

"Ah," cried Constance with a sigh. "Pardon me, dear aunt, for not rejoicing, for even feeling a little sorry. I have spent so many happy hours there."

"It is true," echoed Henriette, "and we all regret it, but mama *would* dispose of it. I presume after all, it is best that it should pass into the hands of a rich man who can afford to leave the forest intact and maintain the place as it should be. He intends living in a style that will astonish all the country side."

"What do you know of his plans?" queried her mother.

"It is quite sufficient to have seen him. Imagine, Stany, a face, and manners," Henriette completed her sentence with the most expressive gestures of ecstasy, "a long moustache, too, fine as silk, and the most disconcerting, fascinating way of looking at you. Just fancy me in my old grey dress, too; he must have thought me hideous."

"That can make little difference to you," said she who had been addressed as Stany.

"How? No difference? You can afford to speak indifferently, for you are always sure of looking pretty; as for me, a touch of elegance is absolutely necessary if I am to look even presentable."

"One might fancy you anticipated turning the head of this unknown, who has tumbled from no one knows where."

"Any one could tell he is a Parisian. How fortunate the women who can select their husbands from such men."

"Pshaw, perhaps he doesn't amount to anything in spite of his fine appearance," ventured Stany, very reasonably.

"Good!" exclaimed Madame Duranton, seizing a few hints from the conversation as she passed back and forth through the dining-room. "That is most sensibly spoken; I wonder what will become of Henriette, she is more frivolous than ever. Gowns, dancing, novels, and matrimony—one might imagine she lived for nothing else. Your duty, Mademoiselle, is to assist me to properly rear your little brothers, that should be your first care."

"It is my care, mama; I should fib if I called it my pleasure. I did not choose to have five brothers, and I do envy an only child with all my heart; they are always spoiled and do just as they please. Is it not true, Stany?"

"If you fear your God, you will honor your father and mother; you should serve as your masters those who gave you life," said Madame Duranton, scripturally reminding her daughter that it was left to her to lay the table.

It was Constance, however, who profited by the

lesson in aiding her aunt zealously. As for Henriette, she shrugged her shoulders impatiently and leaned out of the window to await her father's return.

"Here he is at last," she cried. "Now he will tell us about it."

They scarcely allowed the good man time to ask grace; he was assailed throughout dinner with questions about the Parisian, of whom he seemed disposed to speak favorably, having agreed with him upon the historical grants of land by Nero to the veterans in Gaul.

"Not the slightest discord arose between us," he said, rubbing his hands, and thinking entirely of his ethnologies.

"I should think not," grumbled Madame Duranton, who thought merely of the sale, "he found a great bargain."

"And so did we, Edelmone; so did we."

Monsieur Nougarede, an ardent admirer of Shakespeare as translated by Ducis, had christened his daughter with this name, which even Othello might have found difficult to recognize as meaning Ophelia.

"He removes a terrible thorn from our flesh," continued the pastor, with a sigh of relief. "I should like to have had your father, Stany, but, poor doctor, he is never to be caught. Oh, I know it is not his fault; we are, he and I, each in our own way, at the beck and call of every one. I trust we may be pardoned a great deal for the hardships we are forced to endure here. Had he met M. de Glenne, he would have found him as charming as I did."

"What did I tell you!" exclaimed Henriette to her cousin.

"You, little one, could not judge him so quickly. I do not refer to his appearance, but to his wit and learning, which seem very extensive; he has written some excellent criticisms and historical essays, man of the world that he is; then *too*, he interested himself in *my* researches. And," continuing in a lower tone, as if to himself, "this M. de Glenne is of a terrible world, even though he seems disgusted with himself. He retains a kind of fever, which, thank God, we are spared in our provinces; he bears the marks, so to speak; he is a man whose agitated life has caused him a great deal of suffering, or my experience goes for naught."

"That is exactly why he pleases me so much," gushed Henriette with her usual spontaneity; "I wondered what could be the reason; he appeals to me because he lacks that heavy, dull, virtuous air."

"Henriette," cried her mother, exasperated, "what a pity your twenty years protect you from a whipping; you deserve it far more than your brothers."

The recollection of the one he had received, now caused Louison to burst into tears, his grief intensified by the appearance of a fine jelly tart, when, as an additional punishment, he had been deprived of participating in the desert.

"What is the matter with you?" asked his father.

"Go and see the condition in which they have left the schoolroom," said Madame Duranton, extending her arms to intensify her horror.

"I did not do it," sobbed the child.

"It was not Louison," repeated his brothers, now seized with remorse.

"In that case it was you, you scamps; I shall provide each of you with a task to perform," said M. Duranton without the forceful indignation to impress the youngsters. "Here, Louison, take this cookie and dry your tears; as for you, Henriette, I trust you may never have occasion to discover that too virtuous a countenance is the least of a husband's faults; moreover, you need encourage no illusions upon the subject of the master of the Park; a confirmed bachelor, rich and aristocratic, has no idea of coming from Paris to Nerac in search of a wife."

"At all events, I willingly resign him to Henriette," said Constance gaily, a blush heightening the brilliancy of her dark eyes.

"Yes, I know if we have anything to dread for you, it is more likely the convent," and the pastor drew her to him a little sadly.

"I shall never forget that father has need of me."

M. Duranton laid his hand upon her head with a gesture of benediction, gently lifting her face to look into her dark eyes.

"*Mon Dieu*," he said, "how much you resemble your mother; you grow more and more like her every day."

CHAPTER III.

CONSTANCE VIDAL was, in truth, the speaking image of Marguerite Duranton, at the time she had caused her brother the unutterable sorrow of separating from him upon religious grounds. This spiritual desertion was in a measure attributable to Captain Duranton, who had taken far too much pride in his daughter's beauty and intelligence. She was in his eyes the delicate, priceless pearl of the family. No one could have dreamed she sprang from a race of Albigeois peasants, hewn from the solid granite of the Cevennes. Her transparent skin, delicate profile, and tapering fingers gave her the air of a little princess, and her father, in his idolatry, desired she should receive the education of one.

Moreover, as a widower, possessing no fortune but his pension, it was hardly probable he would refuse the advantages offered the daughters of officers at the Imperial house of Saint-Denis.

His cherished Margot could there acquire, gratuitously, accomplishments unheard of in the provinces.

Samuel, already inclined toward the Protestant ministry, hazarded a few objections; his sister was very young and defenseless to be thrust into such a hot-bed of Catholicism.

He was met here with the assurance that there were plenty of Protestants at Saint-Denis, and a

minister of the Reformation gave them sufficient instruction for all practical purposes.

Although the Captain was a good Huguenot, his military career had robbed him in a measure of that fervor which had animated his ancestors and been transmitted intact to his son; but, on the other hand, he retained their inflexible will of iron, and he prevailed this time as always before. Marguerite was sent to join the ten or twelve little Protestants, who seemed a tiny group of outcasts beside the four hundred Catholics at Saint-Denis.

That southern exuberance, which she still retained in all its pristine spontaneity, suffered a rude shock in a place where discipline is inflexible—retaining as it does, the strict etiquette and traditions of the old convent life. It was immeasurably bitter; she revolted inwardly against the rigorous law of silence, against the iron bars, against the leaden wintry skies so at variance with the blue heavens of the Midi, where the deep ochre of the hills was laughingly swept by the waters of the Baise.

The poor little thing wrote pathetic letters, almost appalling descriptions of this prison buried in the low lands; of its vaulted ceilings and humid cloisters, and still there grew upon her a sort of reconciliation with her surroundings.

As she grew better weaned from the brilliancy of the south she suffered less from the bleak northern desolation. She had formed a friendship, too; a friendship with a child of her own age, the little orphan niece of the General Count de Vardes; and this affection, passionate and exclusive, was a shrine for her in her exile.

From this period, her melancholy gradually lessened; she became a close student, even brilliant, following close in the footsteps of Mlle. de Vardes, who was an intelligent, dominating spirit, a leader in every sense of the word.

During the vacation spent at home the little Duranton spoke constantly of dear Marie, seemingly interested in little else; she prattled, too, of their mutual resolution never to be separated, to spend their lives at Saint-Denis among those noble women who bore the cross of the Legion of Honor upon their shoulders.

"Could you willingly abandon us?" asked her brother sadly.

His alarm might have been of some avail had it been stimulated by the knowledge that Saint-Denis tolerated no Protestant governess.

"Pshaw," laughed the Captain, "leave her to her fancies, mere childish notions;" but he wrested from her throat, and roughly, what he was pleased to term an "amulet," a little sacred medal that Marie de Vardes had given her as a souvenir. Her childish heart bemoaned the loss of this treasure, and the following year she returned with another, more carefully concealed.

Already a vague instinct warned Samuel that the Protestant faith had suffered some diminution with her; he went so far as to correspond with the clergyman charged with the religious instruction of the Protestants at Saint-Denis; this individual of little perspicacity saw his young lambs but once each week, and his reply was couched in the most reassuring terms.

Appearances, in reality, were in Marguerite's

favor; from the time of her arrival at Saint-Denis she had never shrunk from rendering her religious duties bravely, even proud of the term Huguenot, so prodigally bestowed upon her as she went to mass each morning with firm step and uplifted brow, to join, behind the "grille," those whose "views" did not permit their entrance into the chapel.

What *no one* suspected was that she exaggerated these exterior protestations, the better to resist the ascendancy of Marie, who was, be it said, unduly excited by this resistance in her precocious ardor for proselyting. Why could Marguerite not have accorded to one of her own faith the sympathy inspired by this ardent Catholic?

In their walks and in their studies side by side in the garden, the two little friends talked seriously; Marie ventured sweeping arguments against the Bible as Marguerite understood it, so that there existed between them an interminable topic, whereof, it not infrequently chanced, the little Huguenot evinced the deepest thought and knowledge; to cause her to waver in her convictions, a purely sentimental incident was requisite, the which Mlle. de Vardes unhesitatingly qualified as a miracle.

This incident, as it happened, coincided with the imposing ceremony of the first communion.

"I shall pray for you," Mlle. de Vardes had said very mysteriously to her friend the night before her compulsory retreat, "I shall pray that we may become real sisters, as I understand it, and as I believe God desires we should."

During their enforced retreat of eight days the

future communicants, under the supervision of a lady and several novices, are entirely separated from the other pupils, during recreation, at table, everywhere; but their importance is, of course, a subject of universal admiration.

Marguerite beheld, from a distance, her dear companion moving in an atmosphere of celestial beatitude, trebly enhanced by the purity and quietude of the surroundings; she was a thing apart, indeed, and Marie appealed to her as an angel in paradise, while she languished without in the darkness.

During this weary week Marguerite was overcome by the sentiment that she was continually enveloped in a flood of prayer; in her dreams at night, a caressing voice repeated, "Sister, sister, sister," like the quavering diminuendo of the chorister.

At length the great day arrived—one Thursday, and it chanced that no lady felt herself sufficiently courageous to undergo the sacrifice of attending the few little Protestants during the ceremony, and they stood in a quivering little group, quite alone during the solemn mass followed by the admirable procession which glided silently through the quadrangular cloister, lighted by its multitude of tinted lights, and strewn with flowers by childish hands. Their step fell to the low, solemn chant of the choir, while the mistress of ceremonies, whose every movement, correct and perfect, maintained with utmost grace her sacred task.

In her footsteps followed the three virgins, chosen particularly for the regularity of their beauty. Beneath long, filmy veils, their prayer-

books pressed closely to their breasts, they moved slowly forward with downcast eyes, followed by the long file of pupils to whom no particular rôle had been assigned, but who moved vaguely forward as the beads of a living chaplet.

At the feet of the large stone virgin a temporary altar had been erected before which the flower girls, singers, candle and censer-bearers ranged themselves to the right and left to await the first communicants who hovered about the clergy and the Saint Sacrement. They knelt and chanted a prayer, while the priest, clad in sweeping mantles, mounted the steps and a great silence fell upon them, broken now and then by the click of the claquoir (a signal from the mistress of ceremonies to throw the flowers). Amidst a shower of petals and a cloud of incense, the priest presented the Host to the four corners of the cloister, while trembling Marguerite felt her knees bend beneath her, and her head bow down. When she lifted it again she met the radiant regard of Marie, who silently thanked her for this act of involuntary devotion.

In the early morning, during mass, she had been strangely impressed by the words of a priest (majestically clad in long white robes) who had come to preach the retreat. He had told the communicants to have faith, and to pray for their dead parents during this moment when their prayers went direct to God. The tenderness of the Catholic religion burst with a vast revelation upon the little Huguenot, and bowing to this benediction, she felt herself singularly drawn toward a

belief which could console a child for the loss of her mother.

When she related her impressions, Marie exclaimed in a transport of joy, "I was sure of it, I had prayed God so fervently for it." But Marguerite replied to her, that despite her profound attachment, she still felt that she dared take no step without consideration.

Her conversion was not the result entirely of a moment of childish ecstasy, but a step she was destined never to retrace and which she treasured among her dearest memories; she questioned and studied laboriously, sustained in her search for truth by a certain Protestant rectitude, stifling within herself the too impulsive outbursts which carried her along almost in spite of herself.

These years of struggle left their trace upon her whitened brow. Year after year Marguerite's return to Nerac for the vacation was marked by a deeper seriousness and reserve, which, however, was attributed to pride and a disdain for the simple habits of the province.

Her accomplishments and attainments aroused a certain admiration and envy in the little provincial circle, which they said a lady must find very contracted.

She always avoided speaking with her brother upon religious topics, although he frequently sought to talk with her about that which was very near to him. Evidently she cherished a secret from him, a secret which (more than mere absence) separated her from her entire family. Captain Duranton, himself, finally became a little anxious; he concluded that the time had come to

bring her back to the home circle, and was preparing to make known his intentions when he was stricken with an attack of apoplexy, and death intervened to spare him, as it often does, much unknown pain. Marguerite had dreaded her father to the last; she feared the outbursts of anger to which he was habitually inclined, but to Samuel she dared, if not to speak, at least to write.

In a letter quivering with embarrassment she avowed that for some time she had felt in the depths of her soul, that she was really a Catholic; that she had studied in secret and affirmed the truth more and more, until she had resolved, as soon as she should become the mistress of her own actions, to obey that appealing voice. Now that her eighteenth birthday was soon to be celebrated and her education drawing to a close, she desired, as she had always said, to remain at Saint-Denis in the quality of a novice.

His sister a fugitive; his sister a papist; Samuel thought he must be losing his reason. It was at this period he undertook the one trip of his life, the memorable journey to Paris during which he had seen absolutely nothing, for his mind had revolved about the one idea, how to save this poor little unfortunate, how to save her from her error. No doubt she was simply fascinated; he accused the indiscreet zeal of some priest, but his first conversation with the superintendent sufficed to prove to him that neither chaplain nor teachers had had the slightest part in a work that had been accomplished in secret.

So be it. No one was responsible, but every-

thing had contributed to it, he thought, even breathing the air of the old Abbey—an atmosphere of superstition, the atmosphere of the Middle Ages.

He could but wait; “I was right to fear the influences of the place, even the silent ones; each of these black stones distills so much poison,” he would say to himself.

He employed every argument with his sister. He reminded her of their great-uncle, a celebrated Protestant pastor, condemned to the torture, *estrapada*, burned in the time of the dragonnades; he asked her if she desired to make common cause with his butchers. Honor alone (if there remained no trace of the teachings of her childhood), should prevent her passing over to the enemy.

With gentle but invincible firmness, Marguerite responded that there could be no question of a resolution to be taken, but of an accomplished fact, adding that the war-cry of the ancestor of whom he had spoken, in fact, of all the Cevenols, had been liberty of conscience. She was not receding from the principles of her race in claiming this liberty for herself.

This was an appeal to the spirit of justice which no sentiment, however strong, could suppress in the breast of the pastor.

He questioned, though, for a moment, if he should not resort to that authority bequeathed him by his father and carry the little rebel away; it was clear, however, that so radical a measure could avail nothing; her black eyes defied persecution with the energy that had inspired the old Cami-

sards to defy the scaffold and the flames; their blood, too, flowed in her veins.

She would not return to Nerac where her resistance could but create a scandal. It was no longer as a child that she stood before him, but a woman whose strong convictions would reproach him if he compelled her to follow his wishes. She did not deny that the ardent desire she possessed to remain always at the side of Marie added greatly to her natural inclination toward her change of faith. M. Duranton asked to see this persuasive person.

"Mademoiselle," he said to her, bitterly, "you are accepting a ponderous responsibility in endeavoring to replace for my sister, her religion, her country, her family, everything in fact. Are you sure you are capable of such a task? Are you sure of maintaining it?"

Mlle. de Vardes responded with assurance that she was not afraid of neglecting the duties of an affection founded upon a base in which there was little that pertained to earth—an affection which had received the benediction of God. As he looked her over from head to foot, M. Duranton recalled the proselyting spirit of the famous Madame de Maintenon.

"Weigh conscientiously a step that is to be irrevocable," he said to Marguerite at parting; "but no matter what comes, remember that I am always *your brother*."

Marguerite thanked him with a touch of hauteur, firm in the conviction that she should never need him, while poor Samuel, overcome with regret, was compelled to resign the rôle of the

good shepherd who returned to his flock with the lamb that had strayed.

He came home alone, with the air of an old man, discouraged and even determined to expel from his heart, her, who had, alas, already occupied too great a place there. Neither wife nor children, however, could blot from his mind the memory that far in the bleak northland, behind the bars of a Catholic convent, his dear little Margot was a voluntary captive, separated from him by an abyss greater than death could have created between two kindred souls.

He thought her happy, at least, and she was so, indeed, for three or four years after her abjuration. The life of the ladies at Saint-Denis, modified, modernized since, at that time continued, with the exception of certain vows, to resemble that of their predecessors at Saint-Cyr.

They were of course religious, but first of all deliciously intellectual. While they performed their duties scrupulously, Marie and Marguerite had an abundance of leisure, and their mutual affection profited therefrom. It was such an affection as one rarely encounters, an affection without jealousy, without rivals, grand, ennobling—the most soulful, ardent sentiment.

The rules of the convent were inflexible, permitting the ladies few liberties beyond an occasional visit to relatives or friends. Marguerite was rarely prompted to avail herself of these, unless, as it sometimes chanced, Marie would insist upon her accompanying her to her aunt's, the widow of General de Vardes, and to whom Marie paid a visit each month, though she assured

Marguerite it was an obligation she performed with the greatest reluctance.

The countess was a very worldly old woman, who inspired no one with the slightest degree of confidence; Marguerite, indeed, felt a deep antipathy for her and preferred, therefore, that Marie should perform what she chose to term her "drudgery" alone.

Toward the close of the third year it became more or less apparent that the "drudgery" had ceased to be so burdensome; gradually it came about that Marie ceased to joke about the Mondays at her aunt's, and while she made no change in the fundamental austerity of her toilet, there was (perceptible alone to the eyes of a woman) a slight leaning toward coquetry, in the minor details; a mere suspicion that affected Marguerite strangely.

Marie gradually became less communicative in regard to the manner in which she spent her leisure time in Paris, and as the inexplicable, the incomprehensible, creates uneasiness in the mind, Marguerite grew apprehensive, even frightened, instinctively warned by these trifles of an impending catastrophe. It was, indeed, without warning, with a brusqueness bespeaking at once a resolution accompanied by remorse, smothered, dissimulated, that Marie announced to Marguerite her approaching marriage. She had encountered in her aunt's home a very distinguished man, who had sought her hand in marriage.

"The Baron de Latour-Ambert?" Margot tremulously spoke the name of a friend of Madame

de Vardes who had twice returned to Saint-Denis with Marie.

"Yes, the Ambassador."

"Is he old?"

"No; fifty-five, perhaps, but remarkably youthful in appearance: his address is very distinguished."

His age made little difference to Marie; she was a girl to weigh the rank and power of his position, and she vastly preferred his attentions to the love of a younger man; she preferred the discreet bearing of this elderly person, who would never make himself ridiculous by forgetting his age, and who would confine his sentiments to a partially paternal affection. There is nothing more flattering to a young woman than the attentions of a man apparently *blasé*. As for that responsibility of which M. Duranton had warned her, the future Baroness was apparently oblivious. Marie had spoken of this anticipated change with a triumphant smile. It merely bespoke one more instance of subservience to her spirit of domination; like great conquerors who, one victory won, seek new fields, Marie never stopped after a decision to count the consequences to others; the half-suppressed suffering of her friend apparently escaped her.

"Nothing need be changed between us, dearie," Marie said as she embraced her. "You shall continue to be my closest friend;" and Marguerite, choking down her tears, too proud to complain, repeated like a gentle echo:

"No, nothing shall be changed."

The following August, Marguerite accepted the

invitation from her brother, so faithfully renewed each year, to spend the vacation at Nerac. She had always repulsed it under one pretext or another, but now anything seemed preferable to that insufferable solitude, which had weighed so heavily upon her since the marriage of Mlle. de Vardes. Her exclusive friendship had caused her to neglect anything more than mere acquaintance with those about her, and now, knowing her so little, it was small wonder they viewed her with indifference. It was now, indeed, that the truth fell upon her with a volume of light; what she had regarded as a serious vocation was in reality nothing more nor less than the influence of an ill-advised example. Her duties now seemed tame and spiritless to her; she must indeed have loved only the presence of Marie in them before—that constant contact which her correspondence could not replace, although it formed the principal interest of her monotonous life.

Marie was no longer near her. As Madame de Latour-Ambert she had accompanied her husband to a foreign land, and in the interval between her letters, Marguerite paled like a slender flower deprived of the sun. The damp, humid air of Saint-Denis had never been favorable to her health, which had gradually altered without attracting her attention, because happiness lends us a certain moral and physical force that sorrow shamelessly betrays.

Now she seemed to suffer from a thousand inexplicable miseries. A remembrance of the goodness and devotion of her brother came upon her in this crisis (as it had not come since their

semi-rupture) with a vague longing in it; she wanted to renew the past, and try the virtue of her native air upon the unfortunate state of her nerves.

It was still the same staunch Samuel of bygone days who fêted the return of the prodigal, with radiant happiness at having her among them again; but the other end of the table was now supplied with a Madame Duranton, who was a woman of the utmost religious intolerance. The anger she had felt at the bare recital of her sister-in-law's abjuration apparently redoubled in violence when she beheld her more beautiful and attractive than she had ever been led to imagine her.

Edelmone at once felt the most intense antipathy for Marguerite, an antipathy wherein religion bore no part, although she secretly persuaded herself that it all emanated from that source. Within a week, thanks to the executive ability and untiring energy of Madame Duranton, the reputation of the poor lady from St. Denis was established beyond recall; she was not only a pretentious pedant, but totally ignorant of domestic affairs, and affected the manners of a queen. It was a rare piece of good fortune that she had chosen celibacy from inclination, for no reasonable man would ever have saddled himself with such an object of luxury. Madame Duranton was doubly surprised, therefore, when she discovered that Doctor Vidal had taken a different view of the matter.

Doctor Vidal was one of the oldest friends of the Duranton family, and he had known Mar-

guerite as a child, in the early springtime of her beauty, but now he found her thinner and paler, with a touch of disenchantment upon her pretty lips, and her large, dark eyes full of melancholy. Vidal had a generous heart (hidden beneath the brusque manner that contact with the world had failed to polish) and that heart was overcome with tenderness. As a physician, also, he felt that he might labor to overcome that tendency toward consumption that he had seen but too clearly from the first.

Little inclined habitually to venture beyond his study except of necessity, he nevertheless became a constant visitor at the parsonage during those summer months of Marguerite's visit.

She was an accomplished musician, and the inclination Philippe Vidal suddenly developed for the art, was a source of genuine astonishment to those who had heard him repeat a hundred times that that sort of hubbub was intolerable to him; that, in fact, there was nothing except gossip that he held in such utter contempt as the piano. But he never tired of listening to Marguerite playing, nor yet to Marguerite talking, and then came the suspicion that he might have altered his views of women altogether. Apparently our opinions and our impressions are two very different things. The doctor found it entirely useless to formulate to himself his scientific aversion toward that sex of which Marguerite formed so charming an exponent; he forgot all about them when he was with her.

She could, indeed, have employed no more subtle flattery, involuntary though it was, than when

she fell ill and gave to him an opportunity to minister to her cure. That generous mind, so prolific in its charities (gifts unappreciated, perhaps, by the recipients), retains for itself an indisputable mantle of affection that enfolds it in a cloud of beatific sympathy.

M. Vidal felt, indeed, the forcefulness of this after Marguerite's serious illness, when he had succeeded in re-establishing her health. She had fallen ill the latter part of the vacation, about the time she had proposed returning to Saint-Denis.

A serious fever had attacked her while she was visiting the Nougaredes at the Park, whither Madame Duranton had transported herself and family. The doctor exhibited upon this occasion a devotion so far in excess of professional duty, that no one doubted any longer the *sort* of interest he felt for his patient.

When she had recovered sufficiently to appreciate all that he had done for her, she formulated her thanks very tenderly.

"You owe me no thanks, I acted selfishly, entirely for my own pleasure and profit. You will understand, later."

Of course the doctor's secret desire was to appropriate the beautiful prey he had so valiantly contended for with death. During her convalescence he held a serious conversation with his old friend the pastor.

"Your sister," he said, "is out of danger for the present, but there is little hope that she will ever be anything but delicate; she will require serious as well as untiring attention; the fatigue of teaching should be expressly forbidden her; above all,

that miserable régime of Saint-Denis which has had such a serious result. It is out of the question that she should return there."

The pastor shook his head sadly.

"Make her comprehend that if you can," he replied. "She knows that my fireside is hers also, but there exists little congeniality, as you have doubtless perceived, between Marguerite and my wife; then, too, the difference in religious matters."

"I am scarcely guilty of imagining she could reside with you; it would but add one more encumbrance, and that is undesirable; more than that, her feelings would be constantly trampled upon."

"Where would you have her go, then?"

"To a husband," responded Philippe Vidal resolutely, "and that husband—myself."

"My dear friend, one objection,—you are too rich to marry a woman who has no dower."

"Poor reasoning, indeed. Because she has nothing is the best of reasons why she should be assured a comfortable home. My vaunted riches consist of nothing but a modest income left me by my father, and I have never sought to augment it. I am a scientist for the love of it, and one rarely attains to riches along that line. A reasonable wife, not too ambitious in a worldly sense, could, no doubt, be contented with my modest fortune. But you know my circumstances—we have been friends so long. I offer your sister an honorable name, and all the affection of an honest heart. As for religion,—it matters little to me;

for myself, I have none, which it is useless to recall to your mind."

"Had she remained a Protestant, that would have been my second objection, and probably the strongest."

"I congratulate myself then that she became a Catholic. She will be less absolute, less unforgiving. But you must be clear upon one point: while I personally have no religion, I prefer that my wife should have one. In my estimation every free-thinking woman has one less attraction."

"You are a praiseworthy esthetic," laughed M. Duranton; "let us hope that your devotion to your fellow-beings, a devotion you choose to designate by the Christian term of charity, will eventually conduct you to a higher, a much higher sense of God's claims upon you."

"Science is God, one and the same," retorted Doctor Vidal, "but we have no time now to devote to that, and you preach, my dear Samuel, instead of replying to me. Do you think your sister would care to consider me?"

Samuel Duranton remained silent. For himself, he admired Philippe Vidal extravagantly; he was a man approaching forty, slight, but vigorous, whose accentuated features bore a striking resemblance to the statue of Henry the Fourth in the public square at Nerac. After the manner of students, he had grown a trifle bald at an early age, but his mannerisms bespoke a youthful energy and his glance retained its keen penetration. Certainly this physician whose work and fame was so widespread, whose goodness and labor among the poor made him adored by people in-

capable of appreciating his intelligence,—certainly he represented a very acceptable *parti*, but Samuel had always imagined that a man who could appeal to Marguerite must be a paragon, a sort of knight errant who would offer to unhook the moon and stars for her if she craved them. However, he transmitted the doctor's message to her. She listened without surprise, as if she had already guessed and reflected upon it, and the sadness of her consent frightened M. Duranton. Marguerite married because otherwise her situation was hopeless. She shrank from returning to Saint-Denis where Marie no longer awaited her, and she saw the impossibility of remaining with Edelmone. When M. Vidal came to ascertain the result of the conference, she placed her still burning hand with a feeble effort into his. Philippe was overcome with joyous emotion.

"You shall at least find my old Priory as habitable as Saint-Denis," he said merrily.

His home was, in fact, what remained of an old Benedictine priory, surrounded by knotted and tufted old hedges, standing side by side with a curious historical monument, the old convent church—one of those samples of Roman architecture still to be found in the south of France.

The fifteen remaining years of Marguerite's life were passed at the Priory, with the exception of a few absences in the Pyrenees necessitated by her delicate health. Vidal was so entirely wrapped in happiness as a result of his marriage that it was but natural he should conclude Marguerite to be happy also; he was friend,

father, and physician, all in one for her. On the other hand, Marguerite possessed all those qualities so desirable in the wife of a savant, with the exception, perhaps, of a certain household *savoir faire*—an unnoticed defect, as it transpired, for old Catinou, the bachelor-doctor's housekeeper, continued to manage for him as she had done all those years.

While Marguerite was sufficient unto herself to a certain extent, she was prompt to take an interest in the work and researches of her husband, with the amiable curiosity of semi-ignorance which the intelligent woman so well understands. Madame Vidal's most constant care, however, was that little daughter whose advent into the world had satisfied her ardent desire for something to love.

Her strength was gradually failing, and she felt that she must hasten to bestow upon the child all the tenderness she might, for her life in all reason could not last much longer, and she felt that she was soon to leave her little one motherless.

Her first care had been to request Madame de Latour-Ambert to become the god-mother of Marie Constance, that she might assure her an affectionate protection; then, without considering her own needs, she assumed the exclusive care of her baby. In her jealous tenderness she could not consent that a stranger should aid in the task of the child's education, and she had persisted in this determination with a feverish ardor that frightened the doctor.

"You tire her, Marguerite," he would say; "leave the poor little human plant some liberty."

There existed an unconscious egotism in this maternal passion; she was endeavoring to mould another Marguerite who should understand her, whose heart should respond to her most intimate thoughts, and who should continue her religious ardor; she inculcated her convictions with a fervor such as the Christians of the early ages must have felt in arming their children against adverse influences.

"Tell me your pretty story," Stany would say to her mother, in the manner of requesting a fairy tale, and Marguerite would relate the vivid impressions of her first years at Saint-Denis, the incidents of her friendship with Marie de Vardes, the miracle obtained through the prayers of this latter, and how she had felt the "truth" come upon her in the midst of the splendors of the May procession, the description of which bewitched the child, already so exalted. The thought of her mother, so young, as having been the object of such grace developed in Stany the veneration of a devotée; this mother so dainty, delicate and ethereal, who spoke of Heaven as if she were ready to fly away to it, seemed the heroine of a legend which her imagination framed elaborately amidst cloister, tombs, and catacombs, peopled with phantoms. The result of these endless recitals was to enchain the child (far from babyhood pastimes) at the foot of the bed retained so often now by the patient, serene Madame Vidal.

"Love God, suffer for Him, sacrifice everything to Him,"—these words which came voluntarily

to the lips of the sufferer, were imprinted in Stany's heart long before she could comprehend their entire signification, and when that messenger from on high, of whom her mother had always spoken so fearlessly, came to reclaim her, the resignation evinced by the orphan in her affliction was a source of general comment. She who had gone to eternity, had said to her:

"We can never be separated if you remain true; God will permit my presence ever near you; we shall be together in prayer; you have but to listen to my voice in your soul—I shall answer when you call."

Stany implicitly believed that her mother was ever present with her, while she was separated from those who did not comprehend the secret of this mysterious union in God.

After that period of tears and despair roused by the bitter grief of her father, a new era dawned for Stany, one of mystic consolation that blended a kind of beatitude with her regrets.

It seemed to her that by divine favor, the soul of her loved one had been added to hers, that it dictated her conduct, and guided her simplest actions; all the ideas of this invisible companion came to her as her own. Every one remarked the wonderful likeness in her glance, her smile, her voice, and all about the country side it was said, that the child was her mother's breathing image. Even the doctor felt tempted to thank her for having the mannerisms even to the slightest gestures, of his dear wife, and M. Duranton scarce ever saw her without repeating as he had to-day, "How you resemble my poor, dear sister!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHILE her uncle returned to the lessons interrupted by the unlooked for events of the morning, Constance and Henriette went for a stroll about the Garenne, accompanied by Madame Duranton, who had promised Louison a promenade in recompense for that unmerited punishment of which he still pretended to bear the marks.

La Garenne, the only avenue left of the royal park built by Antoine de Bourbon, is the pride of Nerac. Tradition has it that the trees which shade it date back to Henry the Fourth; true or otherwise, the oaks and elms bear evidence of a majestic antiquity.

The avenue leads from the ancient gardens of the Chateau, that silent witness of the gallantries of the court of Navarre, and of those famous conferences, intermingled with fates and intrigues, wherein the beauties of the court of Catherine de Medici so scandalously distinguished themselves. From the Chateau, of which but one wing is left standing, with its exterior gallery supported by twisted columns, it runs broad and straight to the ruins of the fortress of Nazareth, whose historic name savors of the Crusades; and from one end to the other, the sides of this superb promenade are studded with fountains of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, like huge pearls from a profane rosary.

That Baise, whose waters are soiled now by huge flour mills, at that time received into its flowing tide those beautiful nymphs of the flying squadron; a pretty hexagon pavilion, too, whose base is washed by the stream, has served in its day for more than one rendezvous; so, also, that cottage, which Gascon exaggeration has pompously termed a palace, where Henry the First visited his mistress, Marianne Alespee. It is in the basin of the fountain Saint Jean that legend (defying all history to the contrary) places the suicide of poor Fleurette, the little jardinière in love with the King. Not far from here stand two magnificent elms planted by Henry the Fourth and Queen Margot, in token of one of their numerous reconciliations. It is clear at a glance that the subjects of interest to be found in La Garenne are scarcely fit topics for young women to meditate upon. Perhaps Henriette was in a measure laboring under their perfidious influence in broaching the subjects uppermost in her mind, love and matrimony.

Madame Duranton was no longer present to interrupt nor correct, for being a poor pedestrian, she had seated herself under the pretext of watching Louison with a few youngsters of his age, while Stany and Henriette, arm in arm, continued their promenade down the deserted walk; for it is rarely frequented except on Sundays and fête days by the good people of Nerac. Most of the year there reigns immeasurable silence beneath its lofty canopy.

La Garenne was as yet scarcely in its full resplendent beauty; the tender green of early spring

brightened the landscape here and there amidst the wintry browns, while the tree tops stretched dismal and bare; beneath the dead leaves below peeped little tufts of vegetation; the birds chirped merrily about their nesting in the shrubbery, and an odor of fresh sap and flowering herbs filled the silent, warm atmosphere, and the sunbeams sparkled upon the waters of the Baise.

"You doubtless remarked the cleverness with which I prompted this promenade," said Henriette, "but did you guess the reason? I thought that, ninety-nine chances to a hundred, a stranger, totally unoccupied, would come here to pass an hour or two. M. de Glenne—that sounds well, don't you think? M. de Glenne. He must have a title, they always do in novels."

Stany raised her brows indifferently.

"Ah, Stany, I wish I could show him to you!" cried Henriette, pressing the arm she held in hers. "We shall be sure to meet him. What can he be doing with himself all this time? No one stays at the hotel when there is anything else to do. I wager we shall see him before long . . . what shall we bet?" she continued, with animation—"That little lace fichu you tried on me the other day?"

"It had just occurred to me to offer it to you," said Constance.

"How good you are. It is always the same old story at home when the question of gowns comes up—'no money'; I should so love a lot of pretty chiffons, a little superfluity, a bit of the luxury of life."

"I never think of it."

"I know; but you are like no one else. What a pity your mother made anything but a Protestant of you; you might have married a clergyman, and been the edification of the entire parish."

"Little goose!" laughed Stany. She reflected a moment, and became serious.

"Certainly. If a woman belonged to a faith in which the priests were permitted to marry, she could wish for no better fate."

"Ah, no, *merci*, that is not my opinion. One had better remain an old maid than be happy in the way mother is, although father is goodness itself. Think of her duties, *mon Dieu*; just to think of them—it is overwhelming!"

"To have the same religion, to hope the same hopes, seems the foremost necessity in marriage," said Constance quietly.

"Pshaw! if you are much in love——"

"How could love endure without kindred convictions, without that subtle congeniality that is its true foundation?"

"You can agree upon most things without worrying over the next world; that is not the burden of every conversation," said Henriette irreverently. "If my husband makes my life in this world a happy one, he can hold his own views as to the next."

"You seem so childish at times, Henriette."

"Childish!" she exclaimed petulantly. "I am older than you; besides I have an example to prove my assertion. Did not your father and mother live in perfect accord while she was a devotee and he believed in nothing at all?"

"My mother was very sad at times, despite their affection."

They continued for a few paces in silence, Henriette with her lips compressed that she might not repeat what Madame Duranton had frequently said in regard to the melancholy of her sister-in-law—namely, that her regrets sprang from being obliged to live in the country, so far removed from the brilliant associations she had enjoyed in Paris.

"Then, too," continued Stany, "she left to me alone a treasure she valued above all else—the letters from my godmother. From the replies of Madame de Latour-Ambert mama must have confided to her that she was only partially happy. She needed her daughter that she might relish her own existence as she had in the time when that perfect union of heart and spirit existed between her and the friend to whom she might confide everything with the assurance of being understood. How beautiful it must be to enjoy such a friendship," added Constance, while poor Henriette clouded visibly with the air of "am I not your friend?"

"I have you, dear Henriette, but you must admit we are very different—fire and water."

"Yes, I am always afraid of scandalizing you," laughed Henriette. "Let us hope the future will furnish us husbands to our different tastes."

"I have not thought much of it yet; I am very happy with papa, and I think I am very useful to him; Catinou is getting old. Then, it is not merely a domestic question; I help him in more than one way. I am his secretary now; he thinks I do not understand the reports he gives me

to copy (Papa, you know, does not esteem woman's intelligence very highly), especially in a scientific way, and part of what he dictates to me is entirely unintelligible for me; but I seize the spirit of it, and sometimes one word gives me the key to the entire discourse. I think that is what annoyed mama, and it is what separates us in a measure, although we love one another very deeply; I cry a little now and then, but he does not know it. That is as it should be—I can't tell him everything as I could to mama. It was very beautiful then," and she sighed regretfully. "I wish he would consent to let me go to Paris, just once."

"You want to go to Paris? So do I," cried Henriette, "a trip to Paris—I covet it above all things. For the theatres, just to think what they must be like, when we have never seen a play!"

"For me it would be to see my godmother."

"What curiosity! A godmother you do not know."

"It would seem as if I were finding something of mama's. I could ask her so many questions about things she alone must know!—that would be too good!—Papa would never permit it."

"Your father never refuses you anything, and if your godmother invited you——"

"She has invited me, urged me, but papa always finds some excuse for putting it off. He had a deep-rooted antipathy for her; he says she injured my mother by her religious exaltation, and that she would try to embitter me. When I receive a letter from Paris, he falls into a bad

humor, and says, 'Why doesn't she keep her cat-claws to herself?' That is the way he speaks of the poor woman. She has no children, and asks nothing better than to bestow upon me the affection she would have given to them."

"Poor woman!" repeated Henriette, musingly; "she is very rich, is she not?"

"Her husband has occupied some very important posts, but the fall of the Empire put an end to the importance of M. de Latour-Ambert. It seems it was a terrible blow to him; he never recovered from it. He is an old man now, and a paralytic stroke has left him very infirm. Her life must be very sad. Papa says she merits the punishment for her headlong ambition; he is more unkind toward her than I have ever known him to be toward any one."

"They don't like her any better with us either," said Henriette softly.

"Yes, I know," said Constance dryly.

The silence that followed was broken by the sound of a mill-wheel half hidden behind the poplars, where it beat and belabored the still waters into a snowy foam. They had reached the end of the avenue, some two thousand yards, and stood near a dungeon that surmounted a small rocky incline; the old tower, in ruins beneath its mantle of ivy, proudly raised its arrogant and sombre silhouette in the midst of the prairie, while the freshness of its surroundings was intensified by the neighboring river. It stands with the debris of the old fortifications (now merely surrounding a small village) as all that is left of the Chateau de Nazareth.

To-day the ruins boasted an attentive admirer who, from his extreme interest, apparently knew the original plans of this fortress that had been a contemporary of Saint Louis; Henriette saw him from a distance, and uttered a little cry.

"I have won my wager; there he is."

"Let us turn back," proposed Constance tranquilly; "we have gone too far; auntie will have become impatient. Come."

She drew her cousin away, but five minutes later a footstep echoed behind them, and now beside, and M. de Glenne passed by with a ceremonious bow.

"What do you think of him?" asked Henriette, who had blushed as red as a poppy.

"I did not look at him."

"You are trying to be obstinate; he looked attentively at you; he almost stopped."

"He was probably saying to himself that your face was not entirely unfamiliar to him."

"Ah," said Henriette doubtfully; "you will admit, however, that I am a good prophet; doubtless he is overwhelmed with a desire to turn back, but that is out of the question for a man of good breeding. Of course he will not come back—he is already a good ways off. Do you know what I think, Stany? I can imagine what a pleasure it would be in summer, when the moon is full, to wander beneath these trees with the light creeping through mysteriously, and lending such an atmosphere of charm to Nazareth that you might fancy whole troops of old warriors marching out solemnly from the dungeon."

"Now, now, you are becoming sentimental; you would be horribly afraid, and so would I."

"No, I should not be afraid, for I should be leaning upon the arm of a Parisian who, by some miracle, had come to Nerac, and finding things so horribly dull, had fallen in love by way of diversion."

"Would you be satisfied with that?"

"Of course it would become more serious later on; for the present I am content to limit my wishes to this tête-à-tête, with the nightingale chorus. Naturally it would be a little imprudent, but the crime would not be very serious, as it would terminate in a marriage. Can you fancy anything more delicious? My heart throbs to think of it; but, alas, I dare say, it can never come true."

"Never; you may as well make up your mind to that now," answered Stany, with provoking insensibility.

"Do you suppose we could catch up with M. de Glenne?" continued Henriette, half serious, half joking.

"It is hardly probable, at the rate his long legs carry him. Why do you walk so fast? You are not anxious, I hope, to have the appearance of running after him!"

This moral raillery was all lost. On approaching the fountain Saint-Jean they beheld M. de Glenne lost in contemplation of that simple little edifice, which the chevaliers of a neighboring command had presented to La Garenne.

"Assuredly," said Stany in a low tone, "your

father has already inculcated some of his fancies for the monuments of Nerac."

They were obliged to submit to the regards of the stranger in passing, and this time Mlle. Vidal could not deny it was directed to her with a kind of attention one accords an exquisite work of art. This glance was persistent; it seemed to Constance that it followed her after they had passed by. "What impertinence!" she thought, while Henriette remarked:

"Isn't it strange that a Parisian should be so timid?"

"Timid?"

"Yes; nothing could have been simpler than to have come forward and spoken to us. He might have given me some little commission for my father—for instance, in regard to the Park," replied Henriette, with an astonishing presence of mind. "I should not have been in the least embarrassed in his place."

"Perhaps, like myself, he is far-sighted enough to see that your mother is yonder waving her handkerchief to us."

Madame Duranton, tired of waiting, had started in pursuit of them, and had been addressing these useless signals to them for some time. When they perceived her, they hastened their steps even into a run. Constance ran with a singular grace, a fact which M. de Glenne was not long in remarking; he had always admired beauty, even feminine, notwithstanding the scorn he had felt for women in general for the past dozen years.

The following day he had occasion to return to M. Duranton's to regulate a few minor details in

regard to his recent acquisition. M. Duranton noted that during the conversation M. de Glenne's glance frequently wandered toward the door, as if he anticipated some one's entrance; and some one did enter, for Henriette could not resist the temptation to show herself, beautified by the addition of a cerise ribbon in her hair.

"My daughter," said the pastor.

"I had the pleasure of seeing Mademoiselle yesterday in La Garenne, accompanied by her charming sister," responded M. de Glenne with a bow.

"Her sister?" said M. Duranton. "You are mistaken, Monsieur; although I have five sons, I have but one daughter. You allude, doubtless, to my niece Constance."

"Perhaps Nerac can flatter itself in having a beautiful Constance, as Toulouse its beautiful Paule," said M. de Glenne, evincing at once a knowledge of the Midi not displeasing to M. Duranton. Henriette, prompt to understand and exaggerate, amplified this thought with the touch of an artist. "There," she said to herself, "he is in love with Stany—at first sight, too!" After all, Henriette was an excellent little thing, incapable of jealousy or egotism; she immediately bestowed upon the head of her cousin all the dreams she had wasted an entire morning in conjuring up; with her impulsive nature, she leaped from the rôle of heroine to that of confidant, and never a shadow of regret to battle with; in fact, she thought it quite amusing in default of anything better.

Apparently, however, neither the one rôle nor the other was reserved for her, and none of her

prognostics took tangible form. Once established at the Hotel Tertres, M. de Glenne occupied himself exclusively with hurrying up the workmen who were rendering the Park habitable. During the time necessary for these preliminary arrangements, very luxurious in the eyes of the villagers, he made one or two trips to Paris and responded politely to the favors rendered him by M. Duranton by a few brief calls. The pastor had not only pointed out to him the local treasures concealed in the library at Nerac, but had put him upon the track of several precious documents for the continuation of his historical studies.

M. de Glenne had met Dr. Vidal several times at the house of his brother-in-law, and apparently relished the conversation he had with this grey-haired philanthropist, who seemed younger than himself, since he relished life as much as ever. This statement had been provoked by Dr. Vidal declaring the days were far too short to admit of all the necessary things that were to be done.

"What on earth can there be of such importance?" objected M. de Glenne. "What is there, after all, worth thinking about?"

"Ah, Monsieur, I see you have been bitten by the vicious skepticism of our times. How *can* you question the use or the importance of loving our country, assisting the unfortunate, improving our minds, or following up some great research?"

"M. de Glenne may say with Pilate, 'What is truth?' interrupted the pastor with a bitter smile, directed mutually at his brother-in-law and his guest.

"You should derive great satisfaction from

knowing what there *is to be done*," replied M. de Glenne, "and I would willingly attend your school if it were not too late."

"It is never too late so long as we have breath," said Dr. Vidal energetically.

"You are a trifle antiquated, Doctor; you do not believe in mental illness."

"All cowardice. Such illness comes only to those who abandon themselves to it and receive it."

"And to those who have suffered," replied de Glenne dryly.

"My faith, we have all suffered," said the doctor, and the great vertical line on his forehead deepened into an ominous frown, as indeed it always did when anything evoked the memory of his wife. "There is no wound which will not heal in a strong, well body. The venom of egotism exists in all those who would pass for incurable; as for me, my greatest desire is for a little more time in which to labor. You are astonished. You wonder, perhaps, that such a semi-savage, who spends the entire year shut off to himself in the country, could complain of an overplus of attractions or duties; but when, like myself, one has been imprudent enough, among other things, to saddle himself with a doctor's diploma——"

"And," interrupted the pastor, "still more imprudent in notifying the people he attends that he receives no remuneration."

"I no longer belong to myself," continued Vidal, ignoring the pastor's remark; "I am interrupted as often as if I were a doctor by profession. If I chose, I might even take the bread out

of the mouths of my confreres at Nerac. I was very foolish in subscribing to that existing prejudice in the Midi, that every man must either become a doctor or a lawyer, if he is not a donkey."

"A foolishness that you regret?" asked the pastor. "Come now, on your conscience."

"If you put it that way—no; I do not regret it," said Vidal peevishly; "but simply because I am a poor scholar. Otherwise I might have fulfilled my destiny more creditably than by allaying fevers and setting limbs, and have left behind me some trace of my labors, which I take it is our duty. A snap of my finger for suffering humanity, had I been capable of doing anything better!"

"We congratulate ourselves very heartily, then, that you are only a mediocre savant," laughed M. Duranton, with malicious gaiety.

"Ah, I know you wish me bad luck, fanatic that you are," replied the doctor in the same bantering tone.

They had squabbled this way all their lives, with no tinge of bitterness, and when M. de Glenne left them he thought to himself, "If there are any good people to be found in the world, it must be these two." The opinion M. Vidal formulated in regard to the visitor, in speaking with his daughter, was less favorable.

"The pessimism so in vogue has developed near at hand; be on your guard. Fortunately it is mere affectation the greater part of the time."

"Perhaps he is really unhappy," said Constance, with that touch of sympathy never lacking for the misfortune of others.

"Perhaps—like a spoilt child. If the shattering

of certain illusions was alone necessary that we should conclude the entire world wrong, one would encounter nothing but cynics."

"How do you know it is entirely a matter of illusions?" ventured Constance timidly.

"And you, my dear, how do you suppose any one can be miserable continually when they are young, healthy, free, with plenty of intelligence, and an overabundance of money? *Malheureux!* I can hear your poor mother telling me Madame de Latour-Ambert was miserable because she had not found what she sought in her lofty position. The devil! We must make our choice and abide by it."

"But, papa, whether one has all that or not—if they have no one to love them?"

"They must look to themselves for that; one is always loved when they merit it. You are," said the doctor, drawing his daughter into his lap, "and so am I. If we should only be loved by one another, I would consider it sufficient. This gentleman must have a mother or a sister, and it certainly lies with him to marry if he wishes. At all events, we are to be neighbors, and shall discover eventually what there is to him."

"You have invited him to see you, papa?"

"*Parbleu!* He goes to your Uncle Duranton's, the friends of our friends, my dear: besides, we shall be near neighbors."

This neighborly visit, as it chanced, however, was singularly retarded. M. de Glenne had been installed at the Park for more than a month, and as yet had had no thought of it. Scarcely once during his daily rides had he turned his horse's head

toward the village, and yet it was not unworthy of some attention. An ancient walled town, reduced to a minimum number of inhabitants, and where nature anticipating the mourning garb of the pines, lavishly bedecked everything with bloom; dilapidated walls, plumed with self-sown vines, served as a terrace for the little gardens so closely huddled together, wherein the rose and the honeysuckle mingled in wild confusion beneath the sombre foliage of the fir trees; while here and there the thorny spathe of a cactus, rearing its head from some old pottery, reflected the red rays of the sun like a great solitary coral.

The houses of mud plaster and protruding beams hid their poverty beneath trailing clematis or climbing jasmine, while amidst this timid beauty loomed the great church, strangely out of proportion with its surroundings. M. de Glenne had seen all this from his saddle, neither stopping at the Priourat nor at the parsonage. M. Duranton was strangely shocked at such indifference to conventionality, and commented: "Still another heretic like Vidal, come to replace those pagan Nougaredes; certainly the Park has little luck to bless it." The doctor limited himself to thinking, "Zounds! here is a person who affects the tastes of a hermit." But the one who felt the most outraged at this slight show of respectability was old Catinou, the greatest gossip the village boasted. She scented secrets from afar. For once, however, her smooth tongue and boasted penetration found themselves in error; the Park servants had little to confide, M. de Glenne having hired them in Nerac, with the exception of the hostler, who had

brought down some horses from Paris, and he spoke only English.

It came to be well known the new proprietor preferred his solitary rambles over his own estate, beneath the gnarled and twisted oaks, and amidst those pines deluged with tears of resin.

Alone he visited those solitary old dungeons standing resolutely side by side, and the tower d'Avance, or the mill of Barbaste, solicitously avoiding the few inhabited chateaux.

Occasionally, with his gun over his shoulder, he would tramp to some solitary lake, or hide amidst the brush of the hill top and amuse himself by shooting at what wild game chanced within his reach. That was about all Constance could learn of him. That the Park should be inhabited by some one who would not permit himself to be seen, aroused a little curiosity within her in spite of herself. Some sorrow, some mystery? Nothing is more essential to set in motion an imagination of eighteen years, even unaided by the conjectures and commentaries of a cousin Henriette.

"Monsieur de Glenne has made no more calls upon us," commented the latter, "nor has he so much as invited papa to come and see him. It is simply outrageous!" This invisible Parisian had come to be, within a certain restricted circle, the center of public attention.

It chanced one night about the middle of June, that Escaloup, one of the Park servants, presented himself in a hopelessly breathless condition, to beseech Dr. Vidal to come in the greatest haste to attend a lady who was dying.

"A lady!" cried Constance, who was seated be-

side her father on the vine-covered porch of the Priourat, breathing the fresh night air.

"Yes, a lady, who arrived only to-day."

"Who is ill, you say? You must go to Nerac for Dr. Lafourcade; you know, and so does M. de Glenne, that I am not the rich man's doctor."

"M. de Glenne did not send me; my wife told me to run for the doctor," said Escaloup in evident embarrassment. "I came here—it is the nearest."

"Is the case so serious? What is the matter with her?" questioned the doctor.

The messenger, not without some hesitation, be it said in his favor, now divulged what he had probably been cautioned not to mention, that the "poor lady" was very ill; in fact, she had been stabbed in the chest.

"I will go at once," and calling Bereto (Bereto was the name of the doctor's factotum, so called because he continually wore a blue cap that seemed to have grown to his skull) he cautioned him to hurry and harness the horse quickly.

"Stabbed in the chest," he repeated mechanically, "and *he* did not send for the doctor. The devil!—I trust there is no question of murder or suicide.—A bad affair at all events. Is it a young lady?" he asked during the drive, for he had made Escaloup get in beside him.

"A young woman, a beautiful lady, whose hair might have been dipped in gold, such hair as one never sees except in Paris."

"Diable!" muttered the doctor, hurrying the old mare into a more rapid gait.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was but one furnished bedroom at the Park. A vast place of the most simple not to say severe aspect, decorated with a variety of sportsman's trophies and permeated with the odor of cigarettes; here and there a lounging chair to cater to the masculine lover of ease. In this bachelor apartment, dimly lighted by a single lamp, lay a woman; to be more exact, she was writhing in a paroxysm of hysterics, awkwardly attended by Janonette, who, never having seen anything of the kind, stood timidly throwing a little cold water in her face to restore her to consciousness, all the while mumbling exclamations of despair or disjointed prayers.

Some one had had the presence of mind to loosen her apparel, visibly the hand of a man, for the delicate toilet had been roughly torn, while from the slender throat a crimson stream trickled down into a mass of batiste and lace.

"Ah, *Monsieur le Doctor*, here you are at last," cried Janonette. "What an hour I have put in! First she cries as if her heart must break; then she grits her teeth—ah! I don't know what to do with her."

"Are you nursing her alone?" asked the doctor, quietly assuring himself of the gravity of the situation without a moment's loss of time.

Janonette replied in the affirmative, shaking her head in despair.

"Very well; remove that pillow from beneath her head, that she may lay perfectly flat—that is it. Escaloup, hold the lamp that I may see better—merely a scratch, nothing more. Come, my dear madame, calm yourself,—you are very nervous. As for the rest, in a moment it will have disappeared entirely. Rub her arms and limbs briskly, Janonette, while I attach the bandage more firmly than you have it. I presume there is nothing to be had here, but fortunately I have my pocket pharmacy with me. Hand me the linen, a bit of lint and the court-plaster—ah, ah, she is regaining consciousness."

The young person had mechanically lifted her hand to her throat, while her eyelids palpitated violently, her firmly closed mouth relaxed its tension and she breathed a profound sigh.

"There, now, you feel better, eh?" questioned the doctor, in an affectionate, comforting tone. "Your head hurts you, of course," he responded to a convulsive gesture. "It will be all right shortly. Tears now? Cry all you want, my dear; you will get well all the sooner."

"Ah," ejaculated Janonette, wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, "she has too great a burden; poor dear!"

"There is no sorrow in those tears," said the doctor; "purely nervous,—it will relax her. Has she been in this condition long?"

"More than an hour. We ran to the library when Monsieur called. She was lying upon the floor with that knife beside her," whispered Jan-

onette, pointing to a sharp three-sided dagger. "It is the knife Monsieur uses to cut the leaves of his books.—Ah, there she is getting bad again. It has not stopped since we brought her up here. She wakes groaning like a dog (with your pardon, sir) braying at the moon. She tears her hair violently, and then falls back stiff as iron, to begin it all over again a few minutes afterwards. Mind me, she can only come out of this dead or crazy, poor thing!"

"Neither the one nor the other, be assured in that respect; the hand that struck that blow was a very irresolute one. Was it the end of a scene—a discussion?" questioned the doctor in an undertone, continuing to bathe lightly a wound upon the chest in which the skin was merely broken.

"It happened this way," responded Janonette in the same tone. "She arrived in one of the Lajoux cabs (you know Lajoux, the liveryman at Nerac) while Monsieur was out walking. I was here all alone with Escaloup. She said she wanted to speak with Monsieur, and she would wait in the library for him; that we need not mention her to him when he came in. She asked us a great many questions and had us show her over the house—very pleasant she was, too, and plenty of money to spare. We of course told her that after dinner Monsieur was in the habit of going into the library. It occurred to me that she was arranging a little surprise for Monsieur; then, too, she was so nice I thought Monsieur would be pleased—besides she knew how to get what she wanted, so agreeable and generous; for a miserable little bouillon I served her she gave me a gold piece. Just

to look at her you would be sure she was a lady, and did not come for any disagreeable purpose. We were wrong, it seems, for Monsieur has discharged us; but how could we tell—she was so well mannered? We took her to the library, where she wanted to await Monsieur. He came in very late. The Englishman was with him and took the horses to the stable, and Monsieur ordered his dinner served immediately. I was astonished that the lady did not come to the table; she seemed tired, though, and for that matter it was her business and none of ours. She came from Paris, where Monsieur has secrets probably with which she is more familiar than we are. When Monsieur had finished his dinner he went into the library; the lamp was lighted as usual, although it was not quite dark. I approached the door a little, just to see if he was pleased. I understood at once that he was not.

“‘You here, you!’” he exclaimed, as if he were uttering an oath. You never heard his voice so bitter, so angry, and the one of this poor lady so soft. She begged him—yes. I did not understand her words—there is a heavy portière at the door; then, with her sharp Parisian accent, it is a little difficult. Afterwards it seemed as if she grew angry, too; they both talked at once, and I believe he threatened her. Then suddenly I heard a cry, and Monsieur opened the door so quickly I scarcely had time to get away. He called: ‘Hurry! a doctor!’ I was close enough to hear distinctly and ran for Escaloup, telling him to fetch the nearest physician; then I hurried to the library, where Madame was still lying, stretched out, and Monsieur on his knees beside her; he had torn

open her dress, bursting off the buttons without compunction and saying, 'Comedienne! a devil's comedienne!' I can vouch for that; I heard him distinctly; he probably thought she had not really killed herself, and was sorry for it. He despises her, I am certain; it is readily seen, to be sure, if only from the manner in which he said, 'Madame has hurt herself. Attend to her until the doctor comes.' He would not even assist in carrying her to the bed; he called the Englishman to do it. He seemed to feel a repugnance in touching her, but there is certainly nothing repulsive about her; her skin is like satin and her lingerie sheer and as sweet as a bouquet. It is surely the outcome of some love affair, in which the blame lies with Monsieur; men are very deceptive about such things."

This long recital of Janonette's was ventured disconnectedly, in confidential bursts of feeling, while she stood handing the pins to the doctor for the bandage, and in assisting to undress the stranger, who lay perfectly calm now, with her eyes closed; she was pale and inert, as if her apparent insensibility was more voluntary than otherwise, while she was perhaps listening to this elaborate dissertation of which she was the heroine. Then she moved her head, shuddered a little, and opened her eyes, saying in a vague whisper:

"Where am I?"

"In the hands of a doctor who will soon restore you completely if you are good," replied Dr. Vidal cordially.

She looked about her, half frightened, passed her fingers across her forehead and said:

"Take me away; take me away at once. I will not stay here; not an hour—no, not even a moment."

In listening to her voice the doctor felt that the sharp Parisian accent of which Janonette had complained, almost imperceptible though it was, was the accent of a foreign tongue.

"What you ask, Madame, is impossible; I shall call again to-morrow, and then we will discuss what I can do to be agreeable. For the present you must drink plenty of orange flower water and try to sleep; you are completely worn out."

"I wanted to kill myself," she said gloomily.

"Did you really wish it? You were wrong in so doing, at any rate; and you did not succeed; I trust your efforts will help you to banish all such lugubrious fancies. Janonette will stay with you to-night, will you not, my girl?—and when daylight comes you will feel easier; the sun is a fine tonic, you know."

"I had sworn never to see him again," replied the young woman, bursting into tears. "I hate him! I hate the whole world, and everybody who has made me so miserable! I *am* so unhappy," and a pause followed, in which her sobs echoed ominously.

"Perhaps you will not feel so bad to-morrow. Circumstances change sometimes—and people's hearts are touched with pity."

She shook her head slowly.

"It is all at an end for me! I ought to die!"

"Tut, tut, my dear; no more of this, now; try to sleep," said the doctor.

She made an effort to draw her golden hair

about her face, but apparently the pain of her wound, although so slight, caused her to renounce her intention, and with a feeble sigh she hid her face in her arm and closed her eyes.

"You must not leave her an instant, Janonette," cautioned the doctor, in a low tone.

"Be sure of that, Monsieur; I shall stay here until morning and count my beads."

"I will return after breakfast. See that she takes these soothing draughts every hour if her agitation returns again."

"So," thought the doctor, as he left the room, "this fine gentleman for the love of whom a woman attempts suicide, seems to be invisible. The shame and remorse of it, likely; that little woman, *moi foi*, has the most beautiful shoulders I ever saw—like a marble sculpture, so white. He must be difficult to please. But the heart of a man is as flint the day he ceases to love, for there can be little doubt that this is the termination of a romance."

Then, as he was crossing the vestibule, he suddenly beheld M. de Glenne leaning against a door casing, awaiting his exit in all probability.

"I am obliged to offer you an apology," he said, advancing toward M. Vidal with an embarrassment scarcely dissembled.

"An apology, my dear sir, for what? I am glad to have been able to render a service to a person of *interest* to you (the doctor emphasized this maliciously) and more happy still to assure you that this little accident will have no unfortunate result."

A flush of irritation overspread the countenance

of M. de Glenne, and he shrugged his shoulders with well implied indifference.

"That stupid Escaloup interpreted my orders very poorly. I did not intend that he should discommode you, and more, I assure you, I had much rather have seen any face here than yours."

"You flatter me."

"You doubtless understand me. With a stranger whom I might have avoided meeting afterwards, my position would have been less trying—less ridiculous."

"Pardon me, Monsieur, I see nothing in the least ridiculous about what has happened."

"You will not deny, however, and it is very natural, that you have ideas, suspicions, which will argue poorly for our future relationship; for my part, I should be very sorry. No matter, however, what the result may be, permit me to say one word in my own defense; upon my honor, I have done nothing that could have justified such an act of folly as that committed under my roof to-night; furthermore, upon my honor, I have done nothing with which to reproach myself in regard to my conduct toward the person you were called upon to succor. If one of us has committed any wrong toward the other, it lies at her door. Extremely grave faults exist; irreparable ones. This explanation should convince you in what esteem I hold the friendship of a man like yourself, and how loath I am to sacrifice it before I have had an opportunity to claim it."

M. de Glenne spoke with an emotion so little concealed as to prejudice the doctor as strongly in his favor as the most ample proof could have done.

A few moments before, his ideas had been those of Janonette's; now, scarcely knowing why, he changed sides.

"Monsieur," he said, extending his hand to the man who had so bravely faced the most delicate of questions, "I have seen a great many strange things in my life, and have made an effort never to accept appearances too lightly. It is extremely agreeable to me to believe you a thoroughly honorable man, and I shall place every confidence in your word."

They pressed each other's hands quietly, and nothing more was said of the affair between them, but the sentiments of M. Vidal, as he returned home were of an entirely different cast from those he had had in coming to the Park; with singular versatility, he now took the view in exact opposition to his first opinion. "There are in reality," he thought to himself, "some women who are extremely perverse and malicious. If a man falls into their hands, he is to be pitied. However, one should be positive." During the entire return trip he exhausted his brain with idle conjectures. This little foreigner was certainly an abandoned mistress; probably the discord had been caused by some treason on her part; now she repented it, perhaps she still loved him, or on the other hand, and that seemed the more probable, she was perhaps defending the interests of a child he had denied when he repulsed her. No doubt she had come to plead the cause of the little thing along with her own, and despairing of altering the coldness of the man she had offended, she had attempted heroic meas-

ures, feigned or real—feigned more likely—perhaps a mixture of the two. Women are so complicated. Some can really be sincere in comedy. Of all the suppositions he formulated in his thoughts, there was not one he could repeat to Constance, and he was annoyed upon reaching home and retiring to his room, to see the door open very slightly and a voice very much awake, say:

“Well, papa—and the poor lady at the Park?”

The question caught him off his guard.

“How now!” he exclaimed, to gain time. “You are not in bed yet? How absurd! As for the lady, nothing simpler—a relative of M. de Glenne—a very old person—came to visit him, and she was taken with a violent fever.”

The expression of astonishment, incredulity, and the big eyes of Stany, who, partially disrobed, merely passed her head through the opening of the door, convinced the doctor that he must have said something with very little semblance to reality. Catinou, always so prompt and informing herself, had cross-questioned the messenger from the Park very closely, while Bereto was harnessing the doctor's horse. The adventure had been told her from beginning to end, with all the details related to the doctor by Janonette, and she did not tarry in retelling it to her young mistress. It was the wish and curiosity to learn more that had kept Stany awake until her father should return. “Why should papa tell me a story about it?” she thought, more and more interested after the doctor's confused explanation. She concluded that something very mysterious, very terrible, had taken place at the Park.

The days following she refrained from questioning her father, and he maintained utter silence in regard to the matter. Even Catinou could learn nothing more. M. de Glenne had taken himself away and left the intruder alone. She was improving rapidly. The doctor paid his visits regularly every morning, and the time for her departure approached. She was now almost completely restored.

One morning the victoria from the Park passed along the main road through the village: a lady gracefully reclined amidst its sumptuous cushions, and at her feet lay an elegant traveling bag.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," cried the ever-watchful Catinou, "come quickly."

But Stany, for all her haste merely caught sight of a profile half-shadowed beneath a gauze veil; she saw more distinctly a knot of golden hair which glittered in the sunlight, and a charming figure partially concealed in an Anglo-Parisian jacket, just a trifle masculine in its cut.

"What a princess," said the old woman ironically; "you see for yourself that bold woman is as well as you or I; your papa was very *habile* to cure her so quickly, or else she had merely scratched herself."

"She seemed very pretty though," said Constance.

An hour later, during *dejeuner*, prompted by a certain feline curiosity, she ventured to inquire of the doctor if his patient was improving.

"She is entirely recovered now, and on her journey to Paris," he responded briefly. "It is a

great relief in a certain quarter, but professional secrecy debars me from explaining more to you."

This extreme reserve prescribed by conventionality, which M. Vidal pleaded as an excuse to Constance, was not so strictly observed toward others. He was naturally communicative, and the weight of this extraordinary adventure, in which he had played so prominent a part, would no doubt have proven very burdensome had he not considered that for divers reasons he should communicate it to M. Duranton, who, he felt, should understand the position of the purchaser of his estate. Poor Samuel was scandalized upon learning that such events were transpiring in the house he had so long considered as his own.

"I can never put my foot across the sill, and I am overcome with remorse to have been the means of bringing such an unfortunate example unto the village," he cried.

"But I just told you, the real culprit has departed."

"It is not simply a question of the woman, but of him who has reduced her to such extremities; he must first have lured her into wrong, and then deserted her."

"Listen, my friend; if one of the two were lured to wrong, it was certainly not she; you can believe me in that. I had every opportunity to study her. To begin with, she is not so young as she appears to be; she must be in the thirties. Thanks to the artifices employed by coquettes, she can gain five or six years, but the skin is already faded beneath the powder, and there are little wrinkles at the corners of the mouth and

eyes that a doctor does not mistake. This face is only partially good; when she speaks or thinks herself observed, her look and smile are charming; in fact, I imagine she could be bewitching when she gave herself the trouble; but off her guard her eyes look cold, and there is nothing about her mouth to indicate frankness. I wager she is of no account."

"Nor do you know that he has always been," replied M. Duranton, "and, perhaps, he made her what she is."

"I know very little, of course, but the day after that pretext at suicide——"

"Pretext?"

"Certainly, I can affirm that. She merely wished to frighten him, to play a last card; otherwise, the wound would not have been so insignificant. When I paid my second visit, she spoke to me in a voice extremely touching and feeble. 'Thank you, Monsieur,' she said, 'for your kind attention to me. I am ashamed of myself; it is unpardonable to fail in such matters.' Of course, I said everything that I thought could be inspired by compassion or even gallantry. I told her she was very foolish to wish to die when she possessed everything to make life so precious; the greatest treasure in the world for a woman was certainly beauty."

"*Mon Dieu*," interrupted the pastor, "don't repeat your madrigals to me. You had done better to have sent for a priest."

"That was none of my business. I was trying to gain a few confidences; you know one never catches flies with vinegar. I was very insinuat-

ing—so much lost effort. She was far more *habile* than I, and understood how to talk very prettily without saying anything. Her conversation is agreeable, nor is she lacking in wit; it is not difficult to see she is in the habit of receiving every man's devotion and she can tolerate the indifference of none. After all, it was probably a part of her calculations that I should gain a favorable impression of her that I might the better acquit myself of the commission with which she intended to charge me for M. de Glenne. 'It is not my wish,' she said, 'to usurp any longer the home of a man who seemingly cannot look upon me without repulsion. I had intended to write him, but all the letters seemed insignificant and unimpressive. It will suffice if you will tell him I repent of having made this last effort; he shall never hear of me again.' As she gave me these instructions with her handkerchief to her eyes, I asked her if I could not recall to M. de Glenne some material obligation, which he had until now neglected, toward her or toward some being who was dear to her. She hesitated a moment in understanding me, then smiling again with a little irony, she replied: 'Do you refer to money? Under that head M. de Glenne has done all he should; as for a child, such a disastrous complication is fortunately lacking, thank God.' 'Ah, well,' I thought, 'the affair is not so very grave after all—an intrigue, like so many hundred of others, only this woman is more imperious and resolute than the majority, and has followed her lover into the solitude whence he had fled to avoid her.' There can be nothing more exasperating

than a fury of this sort. I remember very distinctly when I was a student in Paris, of the menaces I received at the hands of a certain grisette who was not dissimilar to this woman in appearance, the same *retroussé* nose and feline eyes. Fanny—her name was Fanny—was always ready to bury the scissors in my throat upon the slightest provocation; I couldn't stand it longer than two months."

"Tut, tut, Philippe, what stuff are you repeating to me?" interrupted M. Duranton. "One harvests what they have sown, which is perfectly just. As for me, notwithstanding the pleasure I have felt in conversing with this man, notwithstanding our mutual tastes, I shall arrange matters so that he will never come here again."

"I shall not be so severe. I see no reason to break with the poor devil for such a trifle."

"You call the suicide of a woman a trifle?"

"Yes, when it is merely a mock affair, and when the lady is one of the kind who find consolation."

"Not so loud, Philippe; I thought I heard some one in the next room. I trust we have not been overheard."

Henriette, without wishing to hear, of course, had the rare faculty of always being within ear-shot of what was not intended for her to hear. She had heard of this interview a great deal which would doubtless interest Stany, to whom she faithfully carried every phrase of her father's and uncle's, touching upon the event which had transpired at the Park.

"I believe," she added, after retailing it all at great length, "that I do not envy the Parisiennes,

after all—catering to the mere fancy of such men as M. de Glenne.”

In the life of a girl reared in the solitude and monotony of the country the most trivial events grow into affairs of magnitude. Although Stany, unlike Henriette, was not so readily impressed by mere distinction of appearance and a well-fitting coat, when a drama such as this was enacted almost at her own doorstep, it was natural that her youthful inexperience should be more or less impressed. She thought with a persistency, astonishing even to herself, of this man who was so merciless as to be touched neither by the prayers nor the threats of a woman he had loved, and, unable to expel her from his home, had, with the most cruel disdain, taken himself off and permitted her to remain alone. What could she have done to irritate him to such an extreme? And where was he?” Catinou informed her one morning, among the details of the village gossip, that the master of the Park had returned. She was soon to have a proof of his presence under circumstances calculated to excite in her a keen personal interest.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was seldom that a day passed in which Constance did not go to the church, if not for prayer, at least for a few minutes of silent communion with her mother's spirit. She seemed to feel the presence of this saint encircling the little bench where, as a child, she had passed so many hours during mass, counting the pictures in the unemployed prayer-book, and where, in after years, she had knelt in religious devotion with the vision of her dear mother seemingly ever present beside her.

A book bound in black morocco, sadly rubbed at the corners, lay in the place formerly occupied by Madame Vidal, and in which no one ever sat now but Stany. In her ecstasy she gave herself over to an appealing sentiment in the strictest confidence, closing her eyes to dream that she could feel the nearness of the frail form she had seen lessening day by day, so strangely passing, as it seemed, into ether.

She chose the hour of early twilight, which before it mantled the outside world, invaded the low, narrow naves and shone heavily through the stained windows. Leaning against the high, wooden back, that seemingly still bore the imprint of that cherished head, she invoked the image of her mother, recalling every recommendation and

every instruction the dear one had given her, and promising anew to obey them. She had never confided the love of these sacred moments to any one. Her father knew that she attended the church oftener than he could have desired, but he allowed her every liberty, upon the condition that her Curé (whom he admitted was a noble man) should not visit at the Priourat, for he felt the insurmountable repulsion of the Voltarian for a priest. He also considered it unnecessary to observe too closely a number of useless practices counted by him as so much bigotry. He permitted her to acquit herself of her Christian duties, in a way, as she thought proper, but discouraged any personal directions upon the part of the priest, for M. Vidal was more tolerant than most free-thinkers, and asked nothing more exacting of her. Perhaps, however, the influence of the good old priest who officiated in the parish would have tended more to moderate than exalt Stany's religious fervor, by gradually drawing her dreamy soul into the ordinary channels, thereby permitting the imprisoned fervor to evaporate a little; for now it savored of some subtile essence sealed in a great vase. On the other hand, forced as she was, always to fall back upon herself, that ardent piety of the neophyte which she had inherited from her mother, that Catholic mysticism confounded in her soul with filial affection, was concentrated, and grew vastly in intensity.

To-day, for example, her meditations had touched upon something but rarely considered by youth—the vanity in all terrestrial things—and her thoughts were tinged with a gloom she had

never before experienced, taking their tone, perhaps, from some recent occurrence. The thought that one could love once and *not* always, had come to haunt her with strange horror. "Was it possible," she said to herself, "that two people once having been all in all to one another could become enemies?" The awakening imagination cannot accept these disenchantments without suffering, as the veil is drawn aside from the realities of life, and they are forced upon us as undeniable facts under the head of "that goes without saying."

Stany dwelt upon this insignificance of earthly affection with singular austerity, when suddenly she beheld one of the faces which had mingled with her reflections. When she saw M. de Glenne enter the church it came as a violent shock to her nerves—surprise at first, then joy. The man who seeks God in his sorrow is certainly not hopelessly lost, nor can he, being a Christian, fail, sooner or later, to renounce all vestige of rancor and hate, which, from the rumors that had reached Stany, de Glenne must in one instance have displayed.

Perhaps it was not as a Christian that M. de Glenne visited the church; it might be that he was prompted by simple curiosity to examine the historic features and grotesque animals of gothic architecture. She sat very quietly watching M. de Glenne, who, thinking himself alone, was leaning carelessly against a pillar. He did not kneel, but presently began to make a tour of the church slowly, in quest, perhaps, of that curious piece of Roman iconograph which represents, in ingenuous details, the first temptation. His shadow flitted

beneath the central vaulted roof, and was at times almost indistinguishable; after halting undecidedly before a sculptured stone, he slowly regained the choir and sat down in one of the chairs, apparently overcome and morose, so it seemed to Stany, who watched his every movement. For a long time he sat with his head bowed. Was he praying? In asking herself the question Stany addressed a fervent prayer to heaven that might join or even replace his. She prayed for this stranger, knowing neither his wants nor his sorrows, and she prayed for that unknown woman who had crossed her destiny; she asked that He who is all powerful to change our hearts, might inspire him with thoughts of justice and mercy, and her, poor wanderer, with necessary resignation.

Twice M. de Glenne passed his hand across his forehead with an air of bewilderment, then rested his elbow upon his knee and his chin in his hand, thinking. From the place she occupied Stany could merely see his profile, and that indistinctly, but it seemed to her that his features were becoming more serene, and she gladly acknowledged to herself that he was prolonging his visit to the church for reasons evidently foreign to vulgar curiosity.

The setting sun filtered through the window and lighted upon his bowed head, which was decidedly interesting, Stany thought, with that vague attraction the southerner, who has journeyed little beyond his own clime, feels for the blond type of the north. In any country, for that matter, and to a woman of any race, the

face of M. de Glenne would have appealed as being agreeable and distinguished, but the sympathy of Constance Vidal was aroused more by its expression of profound sadness.

The intensity of a fixed regard has a certain magnetic influence to which persons of a nervous temperament are extremely sensitive. While M. de Glenne had thought the church empty as well as silent, he felt more and more that he was not alone; in looking about him he perceived the outline of a feminine form at some distance from him; hastily, as if he were ashamed or angry at having thought of his most intimate secrets before a witness, he arose and disappeared in one of the side aisles, while Stany, overcome with confusion at having been surprised by him in awkward curiosity, hastily departed by the other. Hazard threw them together again near the door, as the young woman touched her fingertips with sacred water. She hesitated a moment, and then with a deliberate movement offered some to the Parisian. He seemed astonished, while his glance encountered the beautiful black eyes, lifted to him with a look at once grave and timid; rapidly recovering himself he bowed and touching the moist fingers made the sign of the cross. For Stany, whose father had required no concession in this matter, it was a spiritual gauge of fraternity. The vague smile that passed over her features seemed so charming to M. de Glenne that by some enchantment he forgot all else, even the weight of his preoccupation more or less profane, which he had brought into this sacred place where he did not seek his God.

From the portal of the church he watched the adorable apparition vanishing and finally disappear within the house he knew to be M. Vidal's. He remembered now M. Duranton had said "my niece" in speaking of the pedestrian in la Garenne, and it was certainly none other than Mlle. Vidal. So much the better; he should see her again. Several times during the evening he recalled her gentle, chaste expression, so different from anything he had ever read in the eyes of a woman. He seemed still to feel the freshness of that "*eau benite*" and the contact of her slightly tremulous white hand.

CHAPTER VII.

HAD it not been for this encounter, he would doubtless have delayed in paying his promised visit to the doctor. The fear of some allusion, even indirect, to that unfortunate event at the Park had caused him to hesitate until now, but the virtue of the cross imposed upon him at once dispelled all fear.

The following day he presented himself at the Priourat, urged by a sentiment he would have silenced had he exercised that rigorous analysis of himself to which he had been so long accustomed.

Who is there even among the most scrupulously clairvoyant who will not at times act blindly? Who is there who can resist the flavor of a foretaste of happiness, that subtle beverage so sweetly tempting and reassuring.

The reception accorded him by M. Vidal indicated an evident desire, with this excellent man, to forget everything which might in any way be disagreeable to his guest. He entered upon a detailed description of his handsome collection of books; such numbers of botanies and technical works were shown M. de Glenne that it rested with him to extract a certain pleasure from the visit. Doubtless he had nourished some different sentiment, for he returned home vaguely disap-

pointed, having caught a glimpse of no feminine figure other than Catinou.

As he had walked, the doctor accompanied him for a mile or so upon his return journey; he had a visit to pay in that direction to a buxom woman, a trifle coquettish, who was married to a hot-headed, jealous Spaniard. Her husband had become angered with her for receiving the attentions of a neighboring farmer and had in his fury almost killed her with the pitchfork he had had in his hands at the time; she had been terribly misused and scarred with the iron prongs, but the doctor averred that he intended to stand by her so well, that she would soon be in condition to make new conquests. Vidal had a bantering way of putting a thing.

"That is an honest undertaking you propose for yourself," said M. de Glenne, "better allow such mischievous beast to die."

"'Mischievous,' h—m, poor Francounette is not so bad as that. She has born him vigorous children who owe their health and beauty entirely to her. What more could you ask? The hour of the crisis rings in the country as well as the town. *Que voulez?* That is the term which smacks of the soil. But I shall not attempt her defense; you do not seem to have much pity for the weakness of her sex?"

"True," replied de Glenne; "the Spaniard could have struck to better purpose so far as I am concerned. The satisfaction of blows, is, I fear, but half appreciated. Those people can relieve their feelings better than we; our miserable resource is a challenge to a ceremonious duel, with a rival

who is oftentimes as much a dupe as ourselves. But after he administered this first correction, what became of the poor devil of a husband?"

"Good; there you are pitying the executioner. He left his wife lying there for dead, and ran across the fields, scarce knowing what he did, until in the midst of his passionate excitement he thought of his children. The remembrance of his children brought him back; he is there," and the doctor pointed to a small hut close to the roadside. "A propos," continued Vidal, "I had something to tell you, another of my patients before her departure charged me to repeat a promise to you which will doubtless cause you some pleasure; she assured me you would never see her again."

M. de Glenne had changed color instantly.

"It has been a good many years since the person to whom you allude took that vow for the first time, and you know how she has kept it. The words of women count for little; without exception they all lie with the same facility with which they breathe."

"Permit me to plead the cause of a few, before you pronounce such a judgment; think of your mother," responded the doctor from the doorstep.

"I never knew her. I know nothing of the species but the most deplorable examples. To return to your patient: you must keep me informed as to the ultimate termination of her little romance."

"Willingly, but I can foresee the end. He will forgive, so long as the blow was not fatal."

"Then we conclude those people are brutes—in-

capable of feeling as they should, incapable of hating."

"Education has not inculcated self-esteem in them," said the doctor, shrugging his shoulders; "this man will forgive for the sake of his children."

"Ah, children——"

"Say nothing against them, my dear sir, for I could commit all sorts of cowardly acts for my little girl."

"That is readily conceded by any one who has had a peep at Mlle. Vidal. You are a fortunate father."

"Yes, until some one takes her from me. But we have time to prepare for that," continued the doctor, who never thought of Stany's age, he was so accustomed to regard her as a little girl. "I shall see you soon again, I trust," he added, as he entered the low shelter, and de Glenne continued his way.

As his angry thoughts took shape, he laid low the thistles that chanced beneath his cane.

"'Pardon—pardon,' what an absurdity! To know that from top to bottom of the ladder, they are all the same; all—or nearly all, for, perhaps Vidal is partially correct. There are some women who surely would not lie." He recalled the candid face of Mlle. Vidal, with her singularly beautiful face. "Young girls, real young girls—angels—bah!" He interrupted himself with a sharp laugh. "Sooner or later she will be like all the rest; but why did she hide herself so persistently to-day?"

Stany had had no preconceived idea of hiding

herself; she had remained outside from discretion, as she usually did when her father received a call. Twenty-four hours later de Glenne met her as he was passing la Brousse. She was leaving this same hut alone with a little basket on her arm—a visit of an angel to an outcast. In his surprise he stopped to speak with her.

“It seems, Mademoiselle, that you concur in your father’s opinions. You have been visiting a sick person, have you not?”

“How did you know about it?” she answered in the same tone.

“The doctor spoke to me of the individual in question.”

“She is unfortunate, and in a pitiable plight; I brought her a few things I thought she might relish. These people can only afford the coarsest food.”

“You are very good.”

“You do not understand yet; in these parts it is our habit to help each other,” she said with vivacity to disclaim any thought of charity.

“I admire your ability to become interested in that person.”

“Why, pray? In interest myself in all who suffer.”

“Even when they merit punishment?”

She became grave.

“Who does not merit suffering? We all have our faults, either large or small, for which to make reparation.”

“Those are very austere thoughts for one of your age,” said de Glenne, continuing to walk beside her. “Your father knows, of course, that

you come here, and he does not oppose you in it?"

"My father has never opposed my doing the little good that lies in my power. I do not inquire into the faults of the people around me. I could not presume to do that. The Bible says that Christ has pardoned very culpable people, far more culpable than this woman I am sure." Her voice was calm and untroubled, proving that she understood perfectly what she intended to imply, and now it was M. de Glenne who seemed embarrassed. He had met very artless, ingenuous girls in society, who knew nothing of wrong, because their education eliminated anything pertaining to it; he had encountered very bold ones, who spoke of it in attractive terms before they knew anything of it; but this candor, without ignorance, nothing had ever given him an idea of it before, and he felt ashamed of the traps he had been laying for this simple, guileless little woman.

"You are right, I am sure; we should have pity."

For this word she recompensed him with a radiant smile, and as he seemed disinclined to leave her, she nodded a simple *au revoir* as she entered another cottage where she had some dainties to bestow; for the little basket, filled daily for her trip through the village, was not yet empty.

During the days immediately following this happy little encounter M. de Glenne did not see her; several times he called at the Priourat, but Constance did not appear, and each time he felt vexed at her absence. At last, one evening, he surprised her seated at the doctor's desk, copying in large firm letters from sheets covered with the

doctor's hieroglyphics, which he handed her one after the other. This time she remained, and afterwards when he came she did not seek to go away, but in no wise entered into the conversation unless she was directly addressed.

Seated in the window with her sewing (she was rarely unoccupied) she heard all that was said, and her intelligent smile or her silent questioning eyes betokened her interest in the serious topics they usually discussed. Of course de Glenne made every effort to be particularly interesting in these little impromptu affairs, and he would have scouted the idea that he catered to the opinion of this child. No matter; she represented youth and innocence, and perhaps (at least he gathered so from her glance) spontaneous, involuntary sympathy. Such power is sovereign over the imagination of a man, even blasé, even old, as pretended the solitary individual from the Park. After a few weeks, however, he no longer had the right to this title of "solitary," for the bonds of cordiality were fully established between the Park and the Priourat.

"I like this Dr. Vidal more and more," repeated M. de Glenne as an excuse for this assiduity.

Stany, without a thought, passed from the pity she had felt at first, to a frank admiration for this new friend of her father, whose presence brought to the house such pleasant, inspiring conversation. She began to perceive that heretofore their life had been a trifle monotonous. Until now she had attributed it to the absence of her mother, felt that the sadness which overcame her had nothing in common with *ennui*; she had been even happy to feel this sadness as a proof that

her dear one was forgotten no more than in the first days of her absence. Since M. de Glenne had become a visitor at the Priourat it seemed as if she had begun an existence full of incident. These incidents—what were they? The sound of a horse cantering upon the highway, the attention accorded this sound each day at a certain hour, the deception of the slightest delay, the prospect of dining with M. de Glenne, the infinite effort that everything should be, if not so elaborate as he would have in Paris, at least that it should be worthy of him.

What a thrill of pleasurable emotion she had felt at receiving a bouquet gathered at the Park, which, thanks to the care she had bestowed upon it, was still fresh and blooming upon her work table!

These were all incidents to her, and she attached great importance to them; she gave no name to the feeling she had for de Glenne, but she often asked herself why the delicious friendship which had existed between two women (as she saw it reflected in the letters of Madame de Latour-Ambert) could not exist between a man of the age of M. de Glenne and a young girl like herself.

“Unfortunately,” she thought, “the young girl has so little to offer, she is so slightly interesting.” She buried herself in her reading to acquire some right to appeal more directly to his attention and esteem; she sought to acquire the historical studies he had written, and even thought she could discover in them the imprint of genius. Surely, she could never have the audacity to converse with

that man. As a mental exercise she stimulated her father to undertakings he had shunned as too arduous, and she forced herself to work courageously at them. It could only be by mere condescension, she thought, that their neighbor spoke with her upon trivial subjects. She decided to astonish him some day, to make known her knowledge of the sixteenth century, which marked the period of his efforts; but despite her resolution she was ever fearful of appearing even slightly pedantic, and M. de Glenne, in speaking of the roses she cultivated, of her pets whom she adored, of the beautiful walks here and there through the country, continued to limit himself, she was sure, to what he considered her sphere.

CHAPTER VIII.

DURING the vacation Henriette Duranton came to make an extended visit at the Priourat. She was surprised to find upon what a footing of intimacy the Parisian was received amidst her kinsfolk—he who had at one time produced such an impression upon her, although she had forgotten it now entirely. Experiences of that kind succeeded each other very rapidly in the mind of Mlle. Duranton, and the newest was ever the most welcome. A young government official who had recently come to Nerac was monopolizing her thoughts for the present; it appeared, too, that this latest caprice might terminate in a marriage, M. Capdeveille being a Protestant, and in a position where his income, while modest, was assured. Moreover, Mlle. Duranton was in nowise blind to the fact that M. de Glenne was several years too old for the rôle of lover, although the country air had certainly rejuvenated him to a certain extent, and added a healthy freshness to his skin. She repeated, nevertheless, that her father considered him a very dangerous man. Was it not astonishing that M. Vidal should receive at his fireside the hero of such an inexplicable and suspicious romance when gossip about him came from every mouth, although he had wisely suppressed the *facts* by retaining in his employ the Escaloup family.

To think of this man, with his very correct manners and indifferent air, nearly causing the death of a woman. Henriette could not forget that.

"As for me," said Stany, frankly, "I think of it less and less. Not really knowing the truth, and guessing, you know, is not precise, I have concluded to look at it charitably and in the least unfavorable light toward M. de Glenne."

"But how can you be charitable to him without being the reverse toward her?"

"I don't know her."

"Well, I have thought of it a great deal and built a story of it, one that seems very probable from one end to the other."

"What is it? I confess you are more ingenious than I. I have thought of nothing at all."

"It is very simple. M. de Glenne, preferring not to marry, has played the gallant to all women—the most immoral thing in the world, as mama very truly said."

Stany began to laugh, but Henriette continued seriously, being entirely satisfied with her version, and even a little provoked at her cousin's levity; she had grown strict upon this point, the young recorder being of the number who marry early.

"It happened as it always does," she continued, "that these improper persons are caught in their own traps. He encountered a coquette, quite as clever as he—for there seems to be but one opinion in that respect, the lady certainly had the face of a coquette."

Stany admitted that the person of whom she had had a glimpse that morning in the victoria

might be a coquette; in the English novels Henriette loaned her from time to time there was usually the character of a "flirt," and she had formed from that a vague idea of what a coquette might be.

"This coquette," continued Mlle. Duranton with conviction, "was no longer a simple little girl; it seems that widows are generally the most successful at that game, and the age of a widow would correspond better to that of M. de Glenne."

"Ah," interrupted Stany, "we certainly thought him considerably older than he is: sometimes now he does not look more than thirty."

"You know he *must* be six years beyond that, for he was in the war of seventy."

"He was just from Saint-Cyr."

"Very well, this is 1884, consequently it was undoubtedly a widow, a charming person who had a misunderstanding with him as the result of some imprudence. He believed some of the things that were carelessly repeated, and in a fit of jealousy, with no serious motive, severed the relationship that was known to everybody, and thereby ruined the reputation of the lady."

"But," hazarded Stany, "that *proves* nothing."

"Listen, I have not finished; you shall see how probable it all seems. M. de Glenne carried his regrets and his anger with him through Spain; the despairing letters which were written him were lost, for he had confided his plans to no one. Briefly, this young person, receiving no reply and judging he had washed his hands of her completely, could not endure it; she wanted to reconquer his affections or put an end to her exist-

ence, and it was with this intention that she came to the Park. How had she found his address? Pshaw, it was easy enough to conceal your whereabouts in a foreign land, but one can't buy an estate in any corner of France without having it noised about. Having found a clue as to his hiding place, she came and saw him, talked with him, and he, the villain, unwilling to believe in her innocence, she stabbed herself in the heart."

"Not exactly," observed Stany, "as she was entirely cured and able to leave in about eight days."

"It is certain," continued Henriette, interrupted in the composition of her romance, "that from an emotional point of view it would have been better had she killed herself, but I prefer a *dénouement* somewhat less stereotyped that will please those who like a romance to end well."

"You understand, my dear, this romance of yours has neither head nor tail."

"Novels are mere reflections of real life," replied Henriette, sententiously. "In this lonely village where the lonely person had concealed himself there lived a pretty young miss, and, as a consequence of the daily visits between him and her father, she had occasion to speak with him frequently, so what do you suppose she did? She used her influence to bring the two lovers together again."

"Oh, mercy," cried Stany, dumbfounded, "I have no influence with M. de Glenne, and never talk with him except upon trivial subjects."

"With a little diplomacy you could pass from those unimportant things to ones of a more seri-

ous nature. The thing that will make my last chapter really pathetic will be a very delicate allusion to the great sacrifice the young person will have made, for it seems she had begun to nourish a very tender sentiment in her heart, which she smothered as soon as she understood that he who appealed so strongly to her was the property of another."

"Look here, my dear, let us explain ourselves," said Stany, mockingly. "Is it not true that your heroine is called Mlle. Duranton? I know of no one else who, from the first meeting, experienced, or nearly experienced, a tender sentiment."

"Pshaw, childish prattle, mere pastime in waiting for Horace Capdeveille. He only hails from Toulouse, but he is twenty-six years old, and still in the possession of all his hair."

At this sally they burst into laughter, and the conversation, of which M. de Glenne had been the topic, terminated. Several days afterwards, one fine afternoon, they went for a stroll in the oak forest which encircled the Park. Henriette had directed the excursion, under various pretexts, to mask the desire she felt to see what changes the new proprietor had effected, but very little could be seen from the outside with the exception of the entrance gates, which had been painted white and the avenue scrupulously maintained.

"I should love to see what the old house looks like," sighed Henriette.

"Papa dines with M. de Glenne now and then; he told me it was very tastefully arranged," said Stany, continuing her walk.

"And have you never been tempted to enter?"

questioned Henriette, with one or two furtive steps in the deserted avenue, cautious like some timid fawn.

"I never come this way ; there is nothing to bring me."

"La, la, I have more curiosity than you have. I am tempted to run to the other end of the avenue to catch a glimpse, just a little peep at the terrace," and she darted away like an arrow, while Stany called to her in vain.

"How foolish, Henriette. If some one should see you—come back."

Henriette did not slacken her speed, and Stany thought it scarcely generous to permit her to take the risk of the expedition alone ; she followed, but could not come up with her until she had stopped at the entrance to the terrace.

"You see, after all, there is no one about," said Henriette, breathlessly. "And if there should be, it is no great crime. If you are afraid, wait where you are."

"I am not afraid, only I think we both have the air of being very indiscreet, not to say badly reared !"

"Very well, I will accept all the responsibility ; don't worry over it, you are by far too timid."

"Henriette !"

Henriette excited by resistance, had stepped boldly out upon the terrace.

"Ah, Stany, see those gorgeous geraniums in the faïence vases, the entire length of the steps, and those baskets on the lawn ! He must have them watered from morning to night to keep them so green. Who ever saw such grass in this part of

the world before: That is luxury. Real luxury, how clean it all looks—what a transformation! Is it possible this is the same old Park. A fairy must have touched it with her wand.”

“Come, you are satisfied, now; hurry, let us go, please.”

“Just a moment, Stany. How those wooden frames improve the dormer windows; they were so ugly before.”

“A very good effect, but come away—ah! *mon Dieu!* you see we are too late.”

A large fawn-colored greyhound, sunning himself before the door, had looked up uneasily and barked, but he knew Stany, for his visits to the Priourat were festive occasions when Stany fed him upon sugar morsels, and he now bounded toward her with the most extravagant signs of hospitality.

“Down, Dash!” she said in a low tone, continuing her efforts to lead Henriette away. “Down, sir! If Dash is here M. de Glenne cannot be far away. Ah, so much the worse! I can do nothing with you, you act so foolishly.”

Henriette, reassured by the dog’s silence, made another advance toward the house, whose open windows were temptations beyond her power of resistance. What could the lodgings of a Parisian look like, anyway? If the exterior counted for anything, the “camp” must be the *ne plus ultra* of comfort and elegance. As stealthily as a cat, and quivering with her own audacity, she approached one of the windows and plunged regardlessly into the old salon of the late Madame Nougarede. The papering of yore (with its plain

imperial pattern in brown with blue wreaths caught here and there at regular intervals with clusters of Roman lances) was buried now beneath hangings of oriental stuffs; there was a heavy carpet upon the floor that had heretofore been bare; the tiny old gondola chairs were replaced by low divans and upholstered stools; the one round mahogany table of yore was multiplied into a myriad of tiny stands, laden with objects of which Henriette could not divine the usage—the whole breathing an essence of Russia leather a bit intoxicating, for now her head ventured through the open window quite into a room very much in disorder, she thought, for her ideas of arrangement were limited to the stiff chairs against the walls and little square mats arithmetically placed before each one.

“Will you do me the honor to come in, Mademoiselle?” said a voice hailing from some invisible nook. M. de Glenne came smilingly toward the window, while Henriette, dismayed at her own audacity, recoiled now with her eyes set upon him as if she were facing a specter. But Stany came to her rescue with great presence of mind; she had assisted at the disaster from a little distance, and while she was powerless to avert it, could at least formulate an honorable retreat. There was nothing of the prude in the dignity of this little person, nor awkwardness in her timidity. She came up just as Henriette, overcome with her unfortunate escapade, sought to offer some excuse.

“I came with my cousin for—for——”

“Yes,” continued Stany, bravely facing the difficulty and shouldering the misdeed, “we were out

walking, and the desire to revisit the place where, as children, we had spent so many happy hours overcame our judgment. I hope, Monsieur, you will excuse Henriette and I."

"Excuse you!" exclaimed M. de Glenne; "Mlle. Duranton should be perfectly at home here. You must not refuse to rest for a few minutes, the heat is so intense. I beg of you!" he added, and Constance sat down upon one of the rustic benches before the house.

"You prefer to remain outside? Just as you like; Janonette shall bring you some refreshments."

He succeeded in reassuring them by his manner, at once respectful and half paternal. Refined people possess the art of placing at their ease those who have infringed upon strict conventionality by suggesting excuses rather than by seeking to embarrass them. Stany was touched by this delicacy; as for Henriette, in a few minutes' time she concluded that after all she had committed no error, and expanded into endless questions upon the fashion of procedure to maintain so green a lawn in summer (the eighth wonder of the world to a Gascon, who is accustomed to nothing but prairies of burnt brown). M. de Glenne permitted her to question to her entire satisfaction, replying with a minute understanding of the art of gardening, but not insisting, as Henriette could have wished, upon their visiting the interior of the house. He was so amiable that even Stany forgot what there was really shocking in the situation. She did honor to the little lunch served on the terrace,

and accepted her share of the flowers which M. de Glenne gathered for them.

Henriette boldly pinned hers on her corsage, and Stany, rather than appear even silently to blame her for so proceeding, sacrificed her little boutonnière of wild thyme she had so carefully gathered during the early part of the promenade. This afforded Henriette ample amusement for a few moments, and she seized the time (when M. de Glenne, in spite of their protestations, had gone to order the carriage to drive them home) to draw Stany's attention to the fact that her flowers were no longer where she had thrown them.

"You are unpardonable," cried Stany, blushing to the roots of her hair.

"Because I see through things? What became of them? I did not aspire to them, little withered herbs that they were; you did not pick them up again, and there were but the three of us. Now pretend that I made it up, or that I am not a close observer. It passes even my imagination. I should never have dreamed that so great a savant could be so permeated with sentiment—at his age, too; and Parisian besides. Those are childish attentions that I could hardly look for even in Horace."

"It is a pure fabrication," said Stany impatiently, but despite her assurance her eyes sought the spot where she remembered having thrown the little bunch of thyme. It was no longer there. Surely it was mere notion upon the part of Henriette, but she felt less at ease now than ever. M. de Glenne insisted upon driving them back himself, and they offered no objection, thinking their

imprudence in visiting the Park could but be aggravated by any attempt at secrecy. This arrangement would permit of M. de Glenne having a chat with the doctor, who would be in nowise surprised at their adventure, but probably pleased.

The reserved and ceremonious manner of his wife had annoyed him at times; he would laughingly reproach her with being too punctilious, of always looking everywhere but in the right place, and unfortunately this *one* fault had been transmitted, and embodied the *one* fault of the daughter, so that while Stany had never journeyed beyond the paternal hearth, she had a touch of the mannerisms of Saint-Denis.

As was anticipated, the burlesque recital of the invasion of the Park by two young misses, who had been captured and brought home under sufficient guard amused him very much. He kept M. de Glenne for dinner, and the evening passed quickly. A feeling of involuntary vexation, however, overpowered Stany, for M. de Glenne addressed himself preferably to Henriette, and she evidently flattered, received his attentions as graciously as if Horace Capdeveille had never existed.

After supper they went for a stroll about the village. October had just begun, and the sky was a pure midsummer sapphire. About the farmyards the cornshucking was in full blast, with its accompaniment of songs and laughter, stories and riddles, the workmen following their usual form of amusement during the labor. Upon the threshing floors lay the white sheets into which fell the white rounded ears of corn, bereft of their covering of silk and fiber. Nowhere along the route

was the cornshucking half so gay this year as at La Brousse, only a few weeks before the scene of a drama that had so nearly had a fatal termination.

"The Spaniard has pardoned, as I told you," laughed the doctor. At the same instant the voice of a young woman rang out clear and firm above the general tumult:

*"La bach dans la riberoto
L'amour ba,
Landerideto.
L'amour ba,
Landerida."*

(Yonder in the stream, I stretch a silken net. Love seeks to trap the lark. Love flies.)

"Do you know," said M. de Glenne, "everything is poetic in this charming place. I become more and more attached to it."

His heart was expanding, but the motive was a hidden one to him.

"All the better," replied the doctor with pleasure, "we stand some chance of keeping you then. It is a magnificent evening—one of those nights that makes us glad of our existence. Do you agree with me?"

The young voices as fresh and piercing as the lark's shrill pipe, continued their song of love, halting suddenly, from all appearances, by a caress. It was difficult now to distinguish one group from the other, save vaguely in the moonlight, but the lads and lassies were merrymaking together,

CHAPTER IX.

EVERY one knows the country in winter—the silence, the sensation of aloneness, and how it draws near neighbors together as prisoners in a little circle. The impassable state of the roads, sunken by the flooding of rains common to this country, where it seldom freezes, rendered communication with Nerac entirely uncertain. The doctor, indifferent to all external affairs, worked as usual. His entire life (except in case of sickness, when he obeyed the calls grumblingly, but without hesitation, by day or night) was concentrated in his study, which Stany rarely left, being held by the expectation of a daily interest, the visit of M. de Glenne. She prepared herself for it in advance; she arranged conversation wherein she was to place a few words, and which possessed the single disadvantage of remaining entirely imaginary. She sat for an hour before her glass, arranging her hair, and her toilets bespoke an awakening coquetry; then, when the visitor arrived, all presence of mind abandoned her; she could find nothing, or almost nothing, to say; a fear swept over her and paralyzed every idea. What if he should interpret her little preparations as advances made to him? She would die of mortification. On the contrary, it was probable he would never notice them.

However, M. de Glenne always seemed happier

seated in the big chair, which even Catinou had learned to call the neighbor's place, at the corner of the hearth, where the pine fire blustered and blazed. Stany thought his manner extremely amiable and friendly, when, upon entering, he would say:

"It is good in here. I know of no fire that can compare with this one."

One might have thought in reality that he had been cold for a long time, cruelly cold, and that now he was warming himself with relish, soul and body.

"I would willingly pass my life in this nook. It seems to be a little what I am doing; have you noticed? When I prove burdensome, you must tell me; I would go to Paris at once."

Several times he had announced this intention, thus disconcerting Stany, but the doctor had finally said, with his rough hospitality:

"A truce to ceremony. Dispose of my house as if it were your own, and don't speak of it again."

Upon these conditions he seemed on the verge of being entirely satisfied with the Park, in spite of the bad season, which, however, was clement, for the climate of Albret has nothing to envy Italy but her blue skies and dry roads.

That winter was a dream for M. de Glenne—one of those sweet, happy dreams during which we vaguely feel the unreality, and that the pleasure in which we are sinking ourselves cannot endure, and exactly as we guard against the slightest movement which can put our illusion to flight, as we bury ourselves more deeply in the downy

pillows and almost seek to obliterate our personality to escape the brutal awakening, so M. de Glenne felt. He would await with almost juvenile impatience for the hour when he habitually went to the Priourat. It was almost as if he were held and drawn by fine but invincible threads toward his destiny in spite of himself; he could hear the cheery voice of the doctor welcoming him, he could see the glance of this young girl, the eloquent regard wherein he read all her mouth would not own, those eyes shimmering with expectation, half hidden by the long lashes palpitating upon the blushing cheek. Into those eyes he plunged as he would into a fountain of freshness and purity, where he shook from his soul all the bitter fruits of his experience, to envelope himself anew in all the exquisite illusions of youth. Those great velvety orbs were like a magnet to him; when he was away he could still feel their magnetic influence. "What will they say to me to-day?" he thought. In his feverish impatience to know, he urged his horse more rapidly toward the Priourat; he arrived breathless, as if he had run. Every night it was the same thing. A fresh knot had been thrown into the flames, the pine crackled gaily in the midst of the dancing sparks of blue and red, the doctor turned the key of his student's lamp which was illuminating the room as upon some festal occasion, and Catinou brought the tea, asking herself with horror how these Christians could drink tea unless they were ill; but Stany insisted upon this in conformity with the habit at the Park. She was not sorry to appropriate a few worldly little ways from the unknown sphere

in which M. de Glenne had lived. What joy to serve it to him! She acquitted herself with a tranquil grace seductive to this man, long since fatigued with the artifices which ordinarily compose a great part of the feminine charm. M. Vidal was a little bit of the opinion of Catinou, for he had once ventured to ask: "Of what use is tea when we have sage?" and he resolutely transformed the British beverage into a grog by strong reinforcements of whiskey. After these preliminaries, the conversation of the evening before would be continued with enthusiasm, while Stany, returning to her needlework, scarcely ventured a word, though she lost none of theirs.

Usually the two men confined themselves to science, philosophy or history, subjects at once elevated and interesting; questioning each other upon their mutual researches and discussing them generally; these days awakened in Stany a realization of the great difference between the scepticism, vague, anxious and suffering as it existed with M. de Glenne, and the firm unbelief, without anguish which had always so discouraged her with her father. She could not think that perhaps with M. de Glenne faith would come with happiness. Had he not said in her presence that when a man begins to question his scepticism, he is on the verge of believing in everything. "He is returning to the simplicity of the child, which I shall soon have attained myself." To this the doctor replied with a good-natured disdain:

"If you intend to fall into the gibberish of sentiment and paradox, let us cease our efforts to talk reason."

Ah! How Stany longed to give him a reply upon this divine "gibberish." Involuntarily clasping her hands, she thanked God for it. Perhaps de Glenne had seen her gesture; perhaps he understood that he had offered her one of the greatest joys of her life. Occasionally the doctor led the conversation upon the subject of Paris; not frivolous Paris, where Henriette Duranton burned to precipitate herself, if only on her wedding tour with Horace Capdeveille, but upon artistic Paris, where M. de Glenne maintained certain ties and which he painted in the most glowing terms. Aslant these momentary glimpses there loomed here and there entirely personal souvenirs; he seemed to speak of his past now with little effort at secrecy, not that he related anything in particular, but merely scattered incidents like fragments of a mosaic. Stany had succeeded, in spite of the missing bits of color, in constructing a fair summary of the youth of her hero. He had known no family ties, scarcely recalling his father, while his mother had died at his birth. He possessed extensive estates in Artois left him by his parents, but he fled from them now, for they savored of his early disillusion, and should he return to them, his prominence would entail social obligations for which he had little inclination; while the one thing he relished in life was the agreeable liberty his present incognito afforded him.

Of course there is a charm in growing old in the place of one's birth, but he could scarcely appreciate that, for he had been reared in a Grammar School at Paris. His guardian, the Marquis of Veroux, a distant relative, had placed him in

school at an early age, limiting his duty toward him to a holiday each Sunday, when he deluged him with pleasures suitable to his age.

Nevertheless M. de Veroux claimed to have reared him, which claim was questionable under the circumstances.

During the vacation he received him in his summer home, a very sumptuous place, where a fast, aristocratic clique reveled from the beginning to the end of autumn. There were endless hunting parties and private theatricals, and all the restless turbulence attendant upon opulence and lazy frivolity. The little scholar escaped from the black walls of Louis-le-Grand had breathed in this ultramondain atmosphere before his beard had appeared. Upon his return to school he had evoked the memory of what he had seen as so many fairy tableaux which had charmed his senses for two entire months without appealing to his heart, although the condescending coquetry of the pretty women in treating him as a cherub was not without its effect. Doubtless all this was very superficial, but it sufficed to inspire an indomitable revolt against the penal servitude, as he styled his college, in comparison with his somewhat demoralizing vacations. There was clear to him, however, in the midst of this fairy land at the Veroux, young as he was, the immeasurable blank behind the frivolity and pompous ignorance. He seemed restless and dissatisfied everywhere except in the magnificent library, which was the least sought of any portion of the chateau; its accumulated treasures of books of all periods rendered it almost priceless. There he had met, in poor com-

pany, to be sure, those friends who were to accompany him upon his first excursions into the realms of thought and fancy, and who were to cultivate the tastes which afterwards were his preservers in the wreck of his life. This wreck, what could it have been? Stany was always expecting him to mention it. One day, in speaking of the trifling incidents which often decide one's destiny or vocation, he mentioned his entrance to Saint-Cyr as the result of a burning desire to lead a life of activity, and partially, too, as a conformity to certain family traditions which closed to him several professions he might have preferred. Stany scarcely comprehended; she was raised in a part of the country where the nobility is limited and poor, and there exists little class distinction.

M. de Glenne touched upon these memories with a certain ironical disdain, regretting the years he had spent in the service when they might have been consecrated to his studies. Momentarily he had gloried in his military profession. It was in 1870. Had he not already adopted that career, he would certainly have enlisted at that hour. Alas, the morrow that followed the intoxication of his departure and his first battle! His captivity in Germany, in a small town to the northward, where several attempted escapes by the French prisoners resulted in a rigorous surveyance for them all and roll-call twice a day. Oh, it was horrible! It must have been even worse than he depicted it, for after his brief reference to it, M. de Glenne sat for some time quietly, while his features were shadowed with evidences of mental suffering.

The mental sympathy between these two had been perfect that evening without the exchange of a word. Desdemona loved Othello for the dangers he had braved; between them there existed that same tender pity from the one and passionate gratitude from the other—the eternal charm of a tear.

When and why M. de Glenne had left the army was a subject he never touched upon, and still less, even indirectly, of the rôle a woman had played in his life. Stany thought constantly of the lady with the golden hair. Had he known her before or after his long voyages in Egypt, in Algiers, Persia, upon which subject the doctor so often led him; for he, too, had traveled, but methodically, with a fixed purpose, whereas M. de Glenne had journeyed much, at times devoid of any purpose but that of activity.

Had the specter that pursued him been the unfortunate love for this blonde woman, of whom Stany had caught a passing glimpse? This dangerous neighbor could not have chosen his ground better had his object been the defined one of disturbing a young heart. These half confidences were the fitting compliment to the prestige given him by his unconventional arrival and the mysterious events which followed. Had he calculated the danger he was distributing? No, not then, but later it came like a blow; while he lacked the courage to moderate his visits, he saw perfectly well that each day, beneath the eyes of this honest man who received him with every confidence, he was stealing some portion of the heart of his child. During his solitary hours at the Park, he

felt the greatest remorse for his actions. Still, there was nothing for which he could reproach himself. His calls were entirely authorized by the doctor, and he had never breathed a word to Constance which could disturb or annoy her. Did it not seem ridiculous fatuity for him to believe she cared for him? A man of thirty-six, bearing the marks of his sorrow and disappointment, to captivate the heart of a child? Ridiculous!

"It is all at an end with you, poor devil!" he would repeat to himself; "all at an end!"

To afford himself a staunch proof, he would walk to his glass and critically examine his features. "In love at your age, and looking a hundred times as old as you are?" But the mirror replied that in the past few weeks he had grown ten years younger, and he really was still foolishly juvenile, for he sought a little withered bunch of thyme in his portfolio and carried it to his lips.

At the same moment, before her evening prayer perhaps, Stany was thinking of those same little withered flowers she had cast away, questioning herself: "Did he really gather them up? Did he keep them? How does he treat them? Does he carry them about with him?"

All these childish fancies concerning a man whose life had been full of movement, agitation and adventure probably, seemed inexpressibly delightful to her. Upon this strange existence, or rather upon what he had permitted to be known of it, Stany leaned as above an abyss.

"I shall not go to-morrow," decided Raoul de Glenne, upon retiring, and the following day found

him upon the road to the Priourat. He ended in flat disregard of his decision, occupying himself with Constance more directly than he had done before. Haunted by a desire to explore the hidden recesses of this pure soul and mind, he coaxed her to express to him indirectly all her secret thoughts and fancies; in accomplishing this he had recourse to books, reading them aloud to her, an accomplishment in which he excelled. He no longer came alone, but accompanied by companions who pleaded eloquently for him; he brought books with which Stany was totally unfamiliar; although she had read a great deal, it was usually within the limited circle her mother had traced for her, scarcely reaching beyond the seventeenth century.

M. de Glenne presented the great writers to her, those he called his friends, and which he had chosen with great delicacy and discretion from the most beautiful chapters of Chateaubriand and the marvelous evocations of Michelet, to the light romances of Georges Sand. The doctor considered reading one of the most agreeable pastimes, and listened with one ear while he continued his classifications; the sewing gradually fell from Stany's hands; her habitual reserve was cast off, as her tempter had hoped, and she was now all enthusiasm. Scarcely realizing that she was expressing her own views, she gave free rein to her emotions, her preferences; she combatted this or that with vehemence, evincing more culture and discernment than Raoul de Glenne had ever suspected her of possessing; but strongest of all was her profound mystic exaltation and passionate asceticism. Shakespeare frightened her with his vigorous vi-

talities, in spite of the sisterly tenderness she felt for Imogene and Juliette; she feared his biting irony and the philosophic indulgence he accorded the earthly passions, as well as his disgust for feeble repentance. On the other hand, "The New Life" touched a chord of tenderness which melted her into tears. Dante carried her with him completely in his one sentence where he says, "Beatrice looked to God, and I to her." He summed up her idea of love, a divine influence, ennobling and generous, emanating from them both, uniting them more closely, and drawing them simultaneously toward all that was best. She felt that he who read these verses to her looked to her as Dante had to Beatrice, and vowed that he should never see in her aught but the noblest.

So it was these great poets served as intermediaries for their first tender thoughts—thoughts which one in his hours of scrupulous cowardice believed he had successfully pent up, though she had already received and cherished them in the innermost recesses of her heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE latter part of the winter M. de Glenne absented himself upon the journey of which he had spoken so reluctantly; he pretended to have urgent business affairs, while in reality he sought to escape from the delicious torpor and ecstasy into which he was sinking deeper and deeper. Women have at their disposal various philters, and the one Stany had poured for M. de Glenne was strong and powerful, for no sooner had he departed than he began to think of returning. All the usual efforts at amusement terminated in boring him beyond endurance, and he returned much sooner than he had announced, leaving many things incomplete, after making the discovery that the Park suited him much better than any place else. This meant in reality, although he still persisted in disbelieving it, that his existence was too monotonous without Stany. Was she not beauty, youth and candor combined? Would not the companionship of these qualities be the dearest thing in the world to him, while he continued to be entirely disinterested in her? Raoul de Glenne reasoned with himself. What this pretended disinterestedness amounted to he was not long in discovering, when, upon his return, the indiscretion of Henriette acquainted him with the fact that a proposal had been made for the hand of Mlle. Vidal.

The savage desire he felt to strangle this pretentious unknown and kill Stany at the same time rather than that she should belong to another, justified the sentiment that existed in the surrounding country in regard to this quiet, polite man, who had implanted a dagger in the breast of a pretty woman who had had the assurance to visit the Park uninvited, for no reason more momentous—poor thing!

There existed considerable timidity in regard to this irascible Parisian. His door was a place to be avoided, after the same manner that no one spoke ill of him in any but a low tone. Had his recent homicidal thoughts been known there would indeed have been food for comment. They were merely fugitive, however, for almost simultaneously with the revolting request of M. Duranton, he learned that M. Vidal had objected strenuously, alleging the age of his daughter, as well as his desire to keep her beside him as long as possible. As for the response of Stany, it was not difficult to guess after the reception she accorded M. de Glenne, happening to meet him unexpectedly; a smothered exclamation, a joy but poorly repressed, the trembling little hand which he took into his, all signified her sentiment. The doctor alone was deceived. Stany was gay and well. Her spirituality was developing. She was less bigoted. It was quite a natural transformation, a result to be expected, for she was scarcely eighteen.

Nor was the return of springtime without its cheering influence—a magnificent season in Gascony, where the sunshine and flowers dimple the hills, while the hedges of eglantine and the white

daisies glitter like snow over the meadows. The perfume of the honeysuckle ladens the air amidst the vibrating song of the nightingale; the vineyards are in bud, and the green of the mountains (so soon to scorch beneath the ardent suns) for the present unrolls like a velvet carpet, whilst here and there the flowers and meadows sprinkle it with a brilliant dash of color. About Nerac the vast charm of the country lies in its coloring, the harmonious accord of the earthy browns and blue skies, in the pure atmosphere where every detail marks itself vividly upon the vision—here the tower of some old chateau, there the village clock, and now and then a tiny village on the horizon, like a piece of sculptured stone.

At the Priourat the time was vastly occupied in planning and executing excursions here and there for the amusement of Henriette's fiancé, who came occasionally from Nerac upon a livery horse to pay his court to his future bride. The two girls mounted the ponies, which served alternately to ride or drive as the whim took the doctor. They were all rather surprised when M. de Glenne with unexpected enthusiasm, offered to join this rather juvenile group.

He pretended to serve them as guide, claiming to know the country better than most of the inhabitants, for he had explored every strip of it during his year's residence. Stany pretended to be considerably piqued at this, boldly claiming superiority in that respect, while little friendly quarrels took place daily, in which Henriette intervened as arbitrator with comical seriousness.

At first, M. Horace Capdeveille had feared the

mockery and superior airs of this Parisian gentleman, but when he had been amply assured that his local accent would call forth no smile of criticism, and that this high-born person, far from perching upon tiresome etiquette from morning to night, was extremely affable and clever at putting people at their ease and assisting them to display their best qualities, he came to like him extremely, and to imitate him as much as possible, with a fervent admiration for his dress, his manners, and his way of wearing his hair; flattered by the apparent good fellowship, he declared him to be a fine fellow. M. de Glenne would have been amiable with twenty Capdeveilles more exuberant and talkative than this one, upon the condition of finding Stany in their midst. He was grateful to Henriette's fiancé for leaving them so much alone while he paid his attentions to his future bride. Two young people whose marriage is only delayed by a few weeks, more or less, can always find a great many things to confide to each other, which in a measure prevents their hearing what takes place about them. It so happened that no one but Stany heard M. de Glenne the day he thanked her effusively and with a certain humility for having rescued such a miserable coward by pure charity and made him begin really to appreciate existence. The little picture was framed in magnificent surroundings that added strangely to the sentiment of his words; they had chosen a route in the vicinity of the Pentecote, and the thoroughbred of M. de Glenne's suited his gait to the little trot of the ponies; the road was poetic and hallowed with religious memories; even our

little Huguenot couple were drawn toward it in silent admiration with a pardon in their souls that it was dedicated to Catholic superstitions. From the miraculous spring where the thirst of the pilgrim is quenched, to the chapel where a rudely chiseled image of the virgin is protected, they mounted through a labyrinth of winding paths, like a figurative journey to the cross. The tall, dark cypress avenues that separate the different routes are lined with Spanish gorse, like bushes of gold that stretch forth their innumerable arms and load the air with a heavy perfume, as of orange flowers, alternating with roses of every kind and color, worthy of being culled by Saint Elizabeth, the saint of roses. They lie beneath your feet, they hang from the branches above your head, in fantastic array, and thus you advance from post to post, with now and then a loop-hole, from whence stretches far in the distance the most glorious and captivating scenes with the coloring of a Raphael.

M. de Glenne was so struck with the magnificence, he cried:

"These are the same mystic horizons of Fiesole; I feel almost as if I were in the gardens of the Capucins—in that garden where I nourished so many bitter thoughts." He paused a moment and continued: "I was alone at that time; since then there has come into my life an influence that has annihilated a great deal of hatred and malice. What matters it to me now all the evil that has been done me?"

It seemed to Stany as if her heart was in her mouth, but she found the courage to say:

"A blessing upon that influence."

"Yes, blessed be it," he repeated, with fervor. "Your father has well said you are like a rose which blossoms and unconsciously radiates its delicious perfumes to all within reach; you are blooming beneath my eyes, and in looking at you I forget all the wickedness there is in the world; you have made me believe in the good, an achievement which was very difficult."

"Have you pardoned the wicked?" she ventured timidly.

"I have forgotten them."

"Ah," she exclaimed in her joy, "how glad I am!"

"You are interested enough in me to be glad?" he questioned in a half whisper.

"I have prayed a great deal for you," she answered gravely.

She waited for him to add something, she scarcely knew what; but Henriette and her lover, who had lingered behind in a discussion of more terrestrial things, rejoined them now, and they completed the ascent of Calvaire together. This Calvaire differed a little from the Gascon Fiesole, for it represented Christ and the two thieves built of plaster and colored in a disastrous effort at reality. Young Capdeveille, as a good Protestant, expiated upon the uselessness of these figures which with a little exaggeration he qualified as scandalous, and Henriette agreed with him, of course. M. de Glenne preferred the southern crosses with the instruments of the Passion upon it, which had the merit of being purely symbolical; as for Stany, she seemed visibly shocked,

when, after her route through the flower-strewn paths, she came upon the summit of the hill, face to face with these three lugubrious crosses.

"I remember," she said, "what my mother repeated to me so often," that we find a cross at the end of whatever we do. A cross and sorrow at the end of all things. Is it possible? There have been weeks, months, centuries that I have not thought of that."

"It is not worth while to think of them," retorted Henriette. "Mama tells me all those things, too, but I intend to forget them all as soon as I am married."

"I don't know what cross we could have to carry in our household," said Horace.

"Oh, as for me, none whatever. But you, Monsieur, never fear! You will have my bad temper, my giddiness, my poor management, what not? My family can tell you the rest."

"I still have confidence in you," replied Horace, with an honest smile.

"And you are right," involuntarily answered M. de Glenne. "You are beginning right, with every chance before you. I wish I might be in your place."

"To marry Henriette?" questioned Stany lightly; then blushed furiously beneath the long and profound look of M. de Glenne, while Henriette blushed still more at the shocking proposition; young Capdeveille seized the arm of his fiancée with feigned inquietude.

"Don't talk of Henriette," he said. "She is already spoken for and can't desert now."

"And she has no such intention," replied Mlle.

Duranton with amiable frankness, as she poised her foot in the hand of her happy attendant and bounded a little heavily into the saddle.

Stany would accept of no assistance, for she was accustomed to mounting unaided upon the back of Caribin, who was not so very high from the ground, having been sold to the doctor, in spite of his rare qualities, because of not being regulation height.

While Stany was entering with fervor into her rôle of Beatrice (her favorite heroine), with no thought of the many insurmountable difficulties to be met with in life, the doctor was passing a much less agreeable afternoon at quarreling with his brother-in-law. The latter had undertaken to prove to him that he was acting very imprudently in receiving at his house, daily, the new proprietor of the Park; every one was talking of the persistence of this stranger, and attributing a cause very prejudicial to the reputation of a young girl; the gossip had even arrived at Nerac.

"You mean that Edelmone has put it into your head!" cried the doctor indignantly. "Don't talk to me about your Puritans; they can imagine wickedness anywhere."

"Neither my wife nor any one else has permitted themselves to say that any evil exists in this case, but it has gone too far when people even suspect M. de Glenne of doubtful intentions."

"Doubtful? There is nothing doubtful or reprehensible in his intentions; they are as clear as day. He likes to converse with the only man in the neighborhood who shares his tastes; that is what he likes."

"Yes, but this man has a daughter."

"Well, what next? Do I have to be alone in the world before I can receive the visit of a friend?"

"A daughter just at the age to please."

"I proved the contrary the other day when I told you Stany was a great deal too young to think of marriage."

The pastor laughed.

"A fine reason that! Anyway you will admit your daughter appeared particularly well pleased."

"Because, as a sensible child, she thinks as her father does."

"Or because most men seem insignificant to her in comparison with this paragon."

"You confuse her with Henriette."

"Ah, no! Henriette was soon over that. A touch of reality was sufficient. Stany will dream in spite of all, and she will never renounce the ideal she may have chosen."

"Who told you she had an ideal?"

"The change in her. She used to limit herself to a religious ideal of perfection; now since a certain time she has added love."

"What are you singing me?"

"I am telling you the real truth,—I can read a soul."

"A soul!" The doctor gave vent to his little sardonic whistle to signify that he did not believe in souls to that extent. Physically Stany was developing; naturally she would be better balanced. She was still a child, but an intelligent one, capable of appreciating serious conversation in a measure, and yet fond of such recreation as

she derived from the visits of this friend. As for him, he paid little heed to her, beyond the few books he had read for her amusement, and the authors were such as even the pastor could not criticise.

"Had he been less discreet and reserved, he would have made less progress."

"The devil! What do you mean by progress?" The doctor's accent became very marked when he grew angry.

"To succeed in interesting an eighteen-year-old imagination which will never be interested in aught else after."

"She will certainly be interested in other things as well."

"Yes, provided M. de Glenne is a part of it, and he will be, probably. Try to think now, even admitting that the constant use of your microscope has unfitted your eyes for seeing without it, was not Stany less happy and gay during the absence of this person?"

"She was not very well; she had some fever. I gave her a dose of quinine and that settled the matter. The absence of M. de Glenne had nothing to do with the case."

"She hasn't required any quinine since his return."

"A spring fever never lasts any time when it is properly attended to."

"That is to say, instead of treating it, you are cultivating it?"

"The fever?"

"You willfully misconstrue my meaning. This

fever of exaltation, of which M. de Glenne is the object."

"A handsome object to occupy the thoughts of a young girl. He has less hair than I have."

"But it is not grey. A man can be extremely dangerous without possessing the locks of Samson. M. de Glenne has cast a spell over all the women he has seen since his advent in Nerac; we other men have not the key to these seductive ways. I, who admire him in this respect, find him changed somewhat. He has a physiognomy that lights up at times and makes something more of him than merely a handsome man. Look at my future son-in-law beside him; he is so far eclipsed that he ceases to exist. Oh, I am not speaking entirely of his manners and well-bred air, although they are very powerful arms with which to combat a child like Stany."

M. Vidal became thoughtful.

"You have succeeded in worrying me beyond reason; I trust you are satisfied!" he burst forth with rage.

"I am sorry to torment you, but glad to have drawn your attention to what I consider a grave peril for my niece, unless he is entirely worthy of her, and asks her hand in marriage."

"No one will ever be worthy of her," retorted M. Vidal. "I was not worthy of Marguerite, but she married me. Stany may do likewise some day. But," he continued hotly, "who knows but this man of whom I have made such great case as a friend—who knows but he may have those prejudices of rank in spite of appearances? Perhaps he will think himself too great a seigneur for us.

Perhaps he will retreat before this marriage, although he likes to pay respectful attentions to her which will disturb her peace of mind. The devil! There your pernicious ideas are getting the better of me."

"All that is what you must probe to the bottom," said the pastor tranquilly.

"You think that very simple, don't you? I know but one way to do it, and if I employ that it will probably put an end to a relationship that I enjoy; it has made a place for itself in my life—the devil take you with your notions. Before I take that step I had better find out if I am not concentrating my army to give battle to the mill-wheels."

The means employed by the doctor were very simple and also excellent. The following day was rainy, so very naturally, when he returned from his rounds he betook himself to the kitchen fire to dry his boots, and as usual fell into conversation with that bag of gossip, Catinou.

"Well, Catinou, what is going on?"

"Be not much of anything," and the old woman began to laugh between her toothless gums; a good story had occurred to her, which had circulated for the first time the evening before. La Pistolere, she was *enciente* again. Any news to the contrary might have surprised the doctor, for during the past nine years he had assisted her regularly every season to bring a strapping boy into the world—game for the cannon, as Catinou philosophically called them—but there would always be enough of them left to eat what bread was furnished. But that was not the question at

all. This poor Pistolere had permitted herself to be duped by a fine story. A tramp had announced to her the death of one of her relatives, the young wife of Branna, a neighboring workman. The rumor had spread rapidly among the friends and relatives, each one taking their turn at questioning the pretended messenger; they had put him up and fed him here and there to hear his lamentable story, wherein there was no dearth of detail. He had profited by it all until the morning of the funeral he had gotten into the cart with le Pistolet (le Pistolet was the husband of la Pistolere) and asked that he be dropped at a certain point on the route. Of course he ran a risk, but a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. No one suspected him of anything, so when they reached Branna fully twenty persons or more had arrived from as many directions, all draped in black, only to be received by the pretended corpse. She laughed until her sides were fit to burst, but all the same they were obliged to have a solemn fête, for the dupes were dying of hunger. But the fellow who had brought the news—a rat with one hole is easily caught, but this one must have had a hundred, with as many lies in them all. He was not so stupid, after all, to have himself lodged, fed and driven to where he wanted to go. As for those who gave credence to the word of a vagabond!—she shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

It seemed to the doctor, who was so preoccupied with his own affairs, that this epithet applied after a fashion to M. de Glenne. He laughed, however at the gasconnade, declaring that this clever

person must have hailed from Moncrabeau, where the lying stone is found, and Catinou, encouraged by the attention he accorded her, continued to unwind her ball of gossip. A certain fortune teller too often consulted by the giddy-pated girls, had been menaced by the gendarmes, and Francounette had found a new lover, the old one fearing the pitchfork too much to return. That was about all the news.

"And of us here at the Priourat, do they say nothing of our affairs?" questioned the doctor.

Catinou fixed a little piercing, malicious glance upon him; of course he wanted to know if she suspected anything herself. She was not too old to see plainly. She laughed.

"You will be angry, perhaps?"

"Oh, no, what is it?"

"Well, they all ask when the wedding is to be?"

"When the wedding is to be——"

"The wedding of Mademoiselle and the Parisian, naturally; they have been talking of that for a long time. Most every one thought him a little old for her, but of course looks go for nothing, and doubtless he was as good as he had ever been. M. de Glenne was hardly a person to impress the southern peasants, being neither broad-shouldered, brown nor ruddy, but he was very rich, so it came to pass that he did please; the Gascons are practical."

"I instruct you to tell those chatterboxes they are mistaken; there has never been any question of marriage."

Catinou's face, wrinkled, tanned and cracked like old leather, bore an expression of vague incredulity

and stupor; then she smiled again. "Probably," she thought, "for some reason the wedding would not take place at once, and the master did not wish the affair noised about." She understood. While the doctor left the kitchen, slamming the doors behind him, Catinou resumed her sweeping, humming in a high key that refrain always sung at the village weddings. No one could mislead her, old Catinou. She knew something of love-making, if it had been long, long ago.

CHAPTER XI.

M. DE GLENNE was to dine with the Vidals on the day of Saint-Jean. From the Priourat, the view embraces the entire stretch of horizon, which after night on the 24th of June is lighted by the fires on every hilltop. The origin of these fires dates back to Druidical times, merely transposed from the winter to the summer season. The reason for this is of little importance to the Gascons; they pile their fagots and pine knots into heaps and launch the firebrand into the midst of them, while they dance around it in wild enthusiasm, bounding over the flames, the older ones standing with their backs to the blaze to conjure away the infirmities of winter. When there is nothing left of the fire but cinders these are carefully gathered together, and every one takes a piece to deposit carefully upon their mantle. If any one is taken ill this cinder is brought forth and lighted; it is worth more than all the doctors in the country, unless, perhaps, it is Doctor Vidal, who never takes a cent from his patients.

The church has consecrated all these antique customs, but the devil and his sorcerers lose nothing by them; fantastic, lugubrious signs are easily wrought in the flickering light of the fires of Saint-Jean, and all the legends of the country not born of Christmas are reserved for the Saint-Jean.

"You will see a pretty sight, new to you perhaps, for I doubt if you knew of it last year," the doctor had said to his neighbor in inviting him to dinner informally. The invitation had been given some time in advance, before the doctor had realized that he might be compelled to show the door to this friend, so frankly and frequently fêted. "I must sift the matter at once," he said, while Stany busied herself in opening a jar of preserves to add to the ordinary menu; one of those jars of preserves for which Catinou was famous; then, too, was added a jar of pate, scented with the dainty odor of truffe for which Nerac is celebrated.

In the morning Stany had taken a long journey on horseback to gather the mushrooms from under the pines, evidently with special attention to the gastronomic predilection of M. de Glenne.

Heretofore this would have appeared entirely natural to the doctor, as the most commonplace attention upon the part of a careful housekeeper, but now it appeared suspicious to him, disposed as he was, neither more nor less than his sister-in-law Edelmone, to see the wrong side in everything. His mind had been poisoned.

"How is this? Ortolans again. Oh, one might think we were to dine the king in person," he cried, in a brusque tone that his daughter scarcely comprehended.

"A friend is as good as a king," she responded gaily.

"A friend—does M. de Glenne deserve that title from us? If we choose to call all our neighbors friends——"

Stany, who with Henriette was spreading the

table, stopped and looked at her cousin, who seemed troubled, and then at her father. With his brows knit, his lips drawn and his skin darkened, M. Vidal certainly was either suffering or annoyed. She hesitated to speak, and continued with the assistance of Henriette, who suddenly affected an extreme air of reserve, to spread the pretty cloth, all scented with lavender. M. de Glenne arrived in good time, bringing with him some cherries and strawberries from the Park, but they were somewhat coolly received. As for him, he was in the best of humors, but this vague influence, wordless, readily affects impressionable people with a sense of danger, and his hilarity was soon dampened. For the first time, the conversation at the table languished, a peculiar restraint fell upon all those present. Henriette even, had little to say; perhaps she suspected that her father had been lecturing the doctor, and that the result had been unfortunate; perhaps felt a trifle culpable, too, for her senseless chatter may have enlarged the rumor which was causing the sacrifice, and she was careful to lower her eyes and say nothing each time Stany's questioning glance fell upon her. During dinner she watched the windows constantly for the first signs of the festival, to put an end to this tiresome feast where every one seemed to be meditating upon something unforeseen, or to fear an uncertainty.

"Ah," she cried, suddenly throwing down her napkin, "there is a fine fire over toward la Brousse," and she rushed out, followed by Stany.

The two men hastily finished their coffee and

then followed out into the road where the darkness was already gathering heavily, the heavens pierced by myriads of stars, while the earthy fires here and there rivaled them in brilliancy. The light of the glow worm shone in every herb, while on high the constellations looked down curiously upon the joyous dance of the flames before la Brousse where a dozen black shadows were jumping and gesticulating, and the sound of their laughter reached feebly even to the Priourat. A second fire, more modest, was at la Pistolere's, with the same round of diabolical fun, the same wild leaps over the flames which burned high and furiously for any awkward fellow whose limbs might chance within their reach. Further up yet at the Branna place, high above the rest, burned a fire fed with bales of straw whose sparks flew in all directions like the burst of a sky rocket.

The enthusiastic exclamations of the two girls and the Parisian burst forth anew at every fresh flame upon the horizon. The entire country was covered with a cloud of pinkish red which lighted up with bursting gusts the intense black of the pine forest which stood forth in great black masses.

Their slow walk had led them now to a recently mowed plateau where sheep were grazing; owing to the heat during the day these animals were brought forth to graze during the freshness of the night. The shepherd who guarded them was leaning upon his stick contemplating the fires intently; the rising moon, like a great disk of brownish silver, lingered upon this lone figure and upon the white flock he tended; they looked like a great mass of snow in their uniform whiteness.

"There, a picture by Millet," said M. de Glenne.

At the same instant a falling star traversed the heavens.

"Quick, quick—you must wish something," said Henriette.

"My wish is made," replied Stany.

"So is mine," said M. de Glenne, "if it is fair to wish for the impossible."

"Ah, me," said Henriette, "I have nothing left to ask for."

They relapsed into silence, the beauty of the surrounding landscape scarcely admitting of more than an occasional word. It was such a night as one reads of in fairy tales; to talk of anything else would have broken the spell, and they all felt it regretfully when the doctor committed this profanation by breaking in discordantly.

"How silly you are, Stany, to be out here at this hour without something on your head. You will take cold."

"Take cold such a night as this?"

"Certainly. I noticed this morning you seemed to have a touch of it. You must go in, hurry up, run on ahead of us—it is the doctor speaking now. You are unusually imprudent." He had been planning this stroke for fully an hour. Stany was on the eve of remonstrating that she had no cold at all, when Henriette squeezed her arm ominously.

"Can't you see that is merely a pretext, he wants us out of earshot."

"But why," questioned Stany, with a singular contraction of her heart.

"Ah, why,"—Henriette pulled her along rapidly. "Because there are some things which are not

supposed to be said before little girls. They put me out of the room the night Horace spoke to papa, just as if I did not know all the time——”

Stany stopped suddenly, petrified.

“Well,” continued Henriette, “I don’t see any reason why M. de Glenne should not want to marry you.”

“Marry?—me——”

In her immaterial dreams Stany had hardly thought of marriage. To see Raoul (she called him so to herself) from day to day, to imagine that by her mute devotion she was doing him a great good, had been the limit of her ambition. At first her cousin’s unexpected supposition had almost frightened her, but little by little it crept into her soul and overwhelmed her with joy. So this miserly look of M. Vidal’s all evening had come of his discontent at separating from her? But he had soon put an end to that other proposal for her hand; he might treat this one after the same fashion. So, in the conversation going on a few hundred feet behind her, the question of her future was being agitated. After a momentary reflection it looked as if Henriette might be in the right. Oh, if it could only be true, she thought timidly to herself, scarcely feeling the earth beneath her feet in this sudden transport of joy. The night of Saint-Jean had never witnessed a miracle equal to this one, nor lighted up so much happiness. But why had he said, then, that the realization of his wish was impossible?

One by one, the fires burned low, and the brown fields relapsed into their habitual, profound peace, with the serene light of the stars shining full upon

them. No more laughter nor dancing, naught but the croak of the frog accompanied the silence of the night, as the song of the grasshopper vibrates in the sunshine, furnishing their feeble orchestra for each hour of the twenty-four.

Dr. Vidal gave little heed now to these harmonies of nature; the delicious prelude of the master singer, the nightingale, the last perhaps of the season, fell upon heedless ears, so absorbed was he in what he had to say. At length he began rather incoherently.

"First of all, my dear sir, I wish you to know what it costs me—these absurd scruples would never have entered my head, but the father of a family must heed public opinion, no matter how absurd it may be." Between each word he coughed to clear his voice, while his cane struck the bushes or whirled away inoffensive pebbles with rage; evidently he was vastly tormented. M. de Glenne came to his relief in interrupting him.

"What you have to say, my dear doctor, permit me to guess. A little later, perhaps, I should have spoken to you. I have been very wrong not to have unburdened myself to you long ago, in a circumstance which seemed to command it. I have been a coward. You cannot guess the charm that lies in the family circle about the hearth, to a wanderer such as I have been; to enter such a home as yours, and find anew the impression so long forgotten, sweeter and more profound—I have stolen a happiness that was not intended for me."

"Happiness—you exaggerate. If you have found any contentment in our home, rest assured that you have brought a great deal also, and you

have stolen nothing, my friend; we have offered you openly the little you prize so highly. Ah, if it depended upon me alone——”

“I know you are excellent, and that only proves me the blacker. Lack of forethought is a grave fault and often entails disastrous results. I have learned it again at an age when I have no excuse for myself.”

“Do not reproach yourself, nor shall I; the sum and substance of the whole thing is that the world is a stupid place.”

“Pardon me, it is right; no man, it seems, can assure himself of being exempt from certain emotions, no matter how old or how sincere he may be, nor how unbelieving. The feelings I thought I had conquered and killed have awakened anew in me beside this pure and charming child, whose like I had never dreamed existed.”

The doctor thrilled with emotion—it was true then. In the obscurity his eyes rested upon the features of M. de Glenne, but he could read nothing in the uncertain moonlight, which was still pale; he noticed, however, that de Glenne’s voice was vibrant and full of feeling, and he realized that the emotion of the man who walked beside him, was equal to his own.

“I pledge you my word,” continued M. de Glenne with force, “I can conceive of no felicity comparable to that of beginning my life anew with her if I were free; I am not, and because of that I should have rejected all these vain fancies. I should have intrenched myself in my solitary house, and remained there. One word would have excused my absence to you—but when that word

is not spoken at the right time, it becomes daily more difficult. I feel it strangely to-night, but it must be done. You recollect doubtless the adventure which brought you to the Park one night a little over a year ago?"

"The adventure of that dagger thrust," replied the doctor, now strangely oppressed in spite of himself.

"Well, may I ask what your suppositions were in regard to that person who came to my house to attempt her own life?"

"Parbleu, I supposed her to be an abandoned mistress who chose that little comedy as a way of avenging herself."

"I have abandoned no one," replied M. de Glenne slowly, "and the only one of us two who had the right to vengeance was I. That woman is my wife."

"Your wife," stammered the doctor, "you are——"

"I am married," concluded M. de Glenne with a singular accent of irony and bitterness, as if he were cruelly mocking himself, "and if in speaking with you at times of my past, I have never mentioned this episode, it was because it was unfit for the ears that generally overheard our conversation. There could be nothing less edifying than the history of my marriage. Do you wish me to give you the details in a few words?"

The doctor signified his response in an affirmative murmur.

"Well, the year of our war of '70, was a terrible ordeal for me in that respect. I told you that I passed my captivity in a little town in northern

Germany. In the midst of all my ennui, disgust and revolt during this lamentable period, I was unfortunate enough to encounter that which can, as you know, reconcile a very young man, ardent and foolish as I was, to the most distasteful surroundings; that is, a woman and a semblance of the deepest affection. When you recall that as a child I had had no one to love, still less, as a man—no one—no family ties—I was an easy prey for the schemes of a designing woman. If I have hated women since it is because at that time I loved them too well. I cared for them all without caring for any in reality, until my last cursed encounter. The willingness of the German women to amuse us prisoners was not limited, I assure you, but such banal intrigues, terminating with floods of beer, were not very redoubtable; they were simply equivalent to the passing amour of a garrison which the impatiently awaited deliverance would have ended in a few hours, but fate reserved a more sinister trap for me. You have encountered the look from those blue eyes; it had seen less service then and was not so bold; it enchanted me from the first. Arriving in the morning, we wore our faded dirty uniforms, and marched between two rows of curious gaping on-lookers, whom we naturally felt an almost uncontrollable desire to strike. Suddenly I heard near me a gentle musical voice which said in French, 'poor fellows,' with an expression of genuine sympathy, and looking in the direction from whence it came, I saw the same expression depicted upon a face that seemed to me more than beautiful. You can imagine what she could have been at twenty.

She continued her conversation with a person who accompanied her, presumed a companion and added, 'brave fellows,' always loud enough to be overhead; then, in German, she added with a kind of exaltation which went direct to my heart, 'I adore the French; you may be sure they will have revenge some day.' She was not of German, but of Austrian parentage, with the subtle and infinite seduction and the elegant manners of her compatriots. Like myself she hated the little village where she had been brought with the family of her fiancé who was engaged in the war with France. I think a great deal of vengeance and hate entered into the love with which Mlle. de Lebenberg inspired me. To steal from this absent German the woman he loved and who was to be his wife, certainly augmented the relations so readily established between us. As it happened, the house in which I lodged touched the old place in which she lived and which belonged to her future father-in-law, M. Branbach. We met constantly. I knew each time she left the house. I arranged to see her at the concert, the theatre, the river; she skated beautifully. Such an exercise permitted of our meeting. As it happened, it was on the ice, thanks to a mishap which she afterwards told me was voluntary, that I caught her hand for the first time. She chose that the accident should be grave enough to necessitate my assisting her to where Madame Branbach was, in the tent where they served punch and drank wien-grog as they warmed themselves beside a charcoal fire. The few of us who evinced any inclination to be friendly, were received in the best society of the place.

To the most of the men it was repugnant. The dispatches which were heralded about the streets daily fed the anger of the officers and boiled over upon the luckless inhabitant who ventured to be polite or hospitable.

"I complacently permitted myself to accept the invitations offered me by the Branbachs; Freda had ensnared me by the perfume of her golden hair, golden at that time and really magnificent. A puff of wind and the rapidity with which she skated had flaunted the entire mass in my face like a provoking kiss, imperious and sweet at the same time, and I felt the weight of her entire body upon my arm with which I had been compelled to encircle her to prevent her from falling. That I might not suspect her triumphant laugh she had held her muff to her face, and I saw only her eyes brilliant with malicious satisfaction sparkling above the fur. It was impossible to continue in this way. I called continuously at the Branbachs, who were undoubtedly the heaviest, most uninteresting people in the world; naturally the only attraction for me was this pretty girl, who already, to their mind, formed a part of the family upon the strength of her engagement, and who, in turn, very prettily addressed the old woman of the elaborately festooned, elephantine proportions as Mütterchen, while this latter evidently had boundless confidence in her future daughter-in-law. The girl knew well enough how to handle them, to flatter and cajole everybody to suit herself. Mütterchen explained that all Viennese were like Freda, a trifle giddy, like impertinent little kittens, *de keckheit*; but in reality Freda was an angel, a very gay angel,

to be sure, and one that enjoyed fluttering its wings. She was an orphan and would be entirely subservient to them, it was that which had decided Rudolph to marry her. Then too she loved him to distraction. How could she help loving such a handsome fellow?

“His mother proudly held up for my inspection a photograph of Rudolph in the uniform of a Hussar, the ‘Hussar-to-the-death’ dress. It was horrible. He had something so spectral about him; his sinister uniform of somber richness seemed to me like the livery of a war ghost, that hideous ghost which has mowed down a generation of men for us. As I could not kill him, I said to myself (by way of excuse for the cowardice of accepting the hospitality of his family) that I was doing worse still, that no doubt he would much prefer death to the misery of having me steal the heart of his fiancée. There was something piquant in my affront to this superb fellow, like an old war god dressed in his ballad clothes, looking down upon us from his frame that was always wreathed in flowers, thanks to the efforts of his mother and sisters. Freda swore to me that she had ceased to contribute to such sentimental decorations. Of course such bellicose and narrow-minded people as the Branbachs never dreamed for a moment that a man only relatively good looking and bowed beneath the humiliation of defeat, could in any sense rival this triumphant, imposing and wreath-bedecked hero. She loved me nevertheless, strange as it sounds, perhaps urged by her spirit of contradiction, perhaps by a generous, fleeting instinct—I know not what, but she cared for me after her

fashion. It was an intoxicating, dangerous, overwhelming manner that sent my blood boiling in spite of all my reasoning. Yes, she felt that capricious affection for me which she afterwards felt for others, and aroused in me a devilish desire to annihilate any rival."

M. de Glenne ceased, hushed for a moment by an uncontrollable emotion, and they continued for a few moments in silence. Then he went on: "She sacrificed everything to me while she asked nothing in return—nothing—no engagement. Her sorrow when I left was bravely suppressed—and therefore all the more touching. When I re-entered France I got on very well for a time without thinking of her; my country received me joyously, and I could not very well turn my thoughts from it; but little by little her absence told upon me, and it seemed as if she had bound me to her by unbreakable ties, which, magician as she was, she could cause to vibrate when she chose. I questioned myself constantly as to what could have become of her, and I felt the heartiest pangs of jealousy at the thought that perhaps she had married Rudolph, or remorse that maybe she had renounced an elevated rank and fortune for me without any recompense. I tried to assuage my feelings by paying court to other women, but they all suffered in comparison with her; to be brief, I found that she had been more to me than a mere pleasant acquaintance during my exile. I had arrived at this conclusion when she unexpectedly came to Paris, chaperoned by a very complacent old cousin who accompanied her afterwards in numerous other escapades. She wrote me to come

to her quickly, and when I reached her she burst into a violent fit of laughter at sight of me and then fell to weeping; she told me she had decided it was impossible for her to marry Branbach, that she had told him everything, that she had a horror of Germany, and adored France, which I think was true. The pretty refrain which I had heard at a never-to-be-forgotten time, was so well sung in my ears, that contrary to all advice and to my own judgment, I married Freda.

"I married her with that same transport of enthusiasm which might possess a man dying of thirst at the sight of a spring of pure, silvery water suddenly springing up within his reach. The truth is that after all my struggles I found I could not get on without her. Freda had inspired me with a passion which partook more of the character of a malady than of sentiment, possession merely augmented. I was jealous continually; the slightest thing excited me violently, while I really possessed no confidence in her nor any great esteem for her."

"But that kind of thing wears itself out," said M. Vidal, shaking his head wisely, like a doctor diagnosing a common malady.

"It lasted as long as she desired; my will in her adroit hands was like so much wax. It lasted until another had supplanted me as I supplanted Branbach. She was carried away with the world and luxury; she persuaded me to resign from the army that she might live in Paris and maintain a grand establishment at Pommereul during the summer. I followed her like a fool in all her extravagances, amused by her indefatigable, childish

whims; she was a coquette, but I believed her to be entirely innocent of any wrong motives. However, I was obliged to lecture her a little upon the chapter of our expenses, which were entirely beyond my ability to maintain. I do not know in what manner she was reared; for as to what she has told me in that respect I can believe nothing, stories were too natural to her. Certainly, she had been taught no idea of order; at the same time, although her family belonged to an old and noble race, they were not rich and she assuredly could not have been taught from her cradle to throw her money about regardlessly. It is true that courtesans excel in that art—and she was in reality nothing more. One day it all came home to me like a flash of lightning, and I was forced to kill a poor chap, an old friend, who doubtless had wronged me no more than plenty of others, but it fell to his lot first to inspire me with more serious suspicions.”

“Fichtre,” said the doctor, in true Gascon dialect.

“Yes,” replied de Glenne, “I killed the man in a duel, and the remembrance of it haunts me sadly some times. As for the real culprit, she succeeded in making me believe she had merely acted a little imprudently. Could you believe me such a fool? I pardoned and took up my chain again. It was not for long, however. The following year I saw with my own eyes testimony I could not doubt—that which was to separate us forever and cure my passion by disgust. Yes, to cure it radically and rapidly, as a steel blade

could have done. I surprised her with the Marquis de Veroux."

"How, with your guardian?"

"With the old man of whom I have spoken to you, the one who reared me. No one had blamed me for my marriage so much as he. To listen to him, I had permitted myself to be taken in the net of adventuress; my wife had at first inspired him with a violent antipathy. For her part, she had ridiculed him cruelly, calling him a sexagenarian gallant, with the ugliness of a satyr. Things went from bad to worse. She was always heavily in debt, and probably some of her caprices were for the purpose of silencing her creditors. I told her with a scorn that she doubtless understood, for she did not lack intelligence, that all was now over between us, and as it was out of the question to fight a man of sixty-five who had taken the place of a father to me, I would limit myself to a simple separation. This was readily obtained, for Madame de Glenne subscribed to this arrangement to avoid a scandal. No one knew exactly what had transpired. That is all. She ruined my career, she acted upon me after the manner of a dissolvent; she had caused me to renounce my profession. I was nothing more than a grain of sand washed hither and thither by the currents. Travel quieted me; it is the best tonic—new scenes, constant change, healthy fatigue, a material struggle against certain dangers. You are remodeled after a fashion; you forget that humanity which has caused you so much pain, and which, after all, counts for so little in the universe. I pulled myself together finally, for I had health,

a considerable fortune, and that independence of action which falls to the lot of very few. I conquered my bitterness toward people, and at the same time determined upon a strict annihilation of any sentimental tendencies in my own make-up. I had accomplished this when a taste for literary work took possession of me. I began to write with a total disregard for the approval of others, as I began to renew my life-work again; that is the only life left me now—an intellectual one.

“I delved into history, where I could choose what friends I liked, with the assurance that they at least could cherish no malice nor evil intentions toward me. From the moment I made that decision I was saved, but of course it is impossible to undertake that sort of thing striding about the world. To be within reach of a great library drew me successively into the largest cities of the continent. I hovered about the British Museum and our own national archives. No sooner, however, had I collected the notes I desired, than I was possessed of the idea that I must bury myself in some obscure place where I might digest what knowledge I had acquired and work uninterruptedly. That explains my reason for purchasing the Park. I was tired of roaming about, and resolved to settle down in some one place. Unfortunately, the person I least desired to see discovered my whereabouts, in which attempt she had until now been baffled, owing to my constant change of scene. She now came to sing me the story of a banal repentance: ‘I have suffered, I have expiated my sin,’ but such a confession could find little response from me, and, as you know,

met with a frigid reception; that it was which determined her project to attempt suicide—a theatrical falsity, like everything else that emanates from her. Since that little comedy, I have heard nothing from her, but I wager she is enjoying the best of health. Such creatures exist eternally for the shame and sorrow of others.”

As for the doctor, he saw no just reason why Madame de Glenne might not continue to exist. The story of her husband's experiences seemed to indicate less tenacity of purpose and less equilibrium than he could have wished for in the man as he thought him to be. He could effectually silence all gossiping tongues now, by responding to their questions about the wedding: “You are crazy, my friend; M. de Glenne is a married man,” leaving them to suppose that he had known it all the time.

Stany, of course, must know of this surprising situation at once, that she might no longer run the risk of losing her head—admitting that she was in any respect so inclined. A married man! What young girl would not retreat before such an obstacle as that. Yes, Stany must be enlightened at once.

“My dear sir,” he said to M. de Glenne, “the confidence you have shown me touches me very deeply, and in nowise alters my sentiments towards you. I pity you extremely, but you must look into the future cheerfully, and by devoting all your attention to your work, everything will come out right. My prescription would be to work; continue to cherish your contempt and indignation toward

humanity; they are powerful enemies of tender sentiments."

"And cease to make my usual visits to the Priourat: that is what you would add, is it not?" said de Glenne with a bitter smile.

"I do not say that, but of your own accord, you will doubtless come less frequently. You know, of course, that my daughter is in entire ignorance of any gossip in regard to your calls. How should she suspect others of an idea so foreign to her thoughts?"

M. de Glenne regarded the doctor sadly.

"There is little need to mention that; such a thought could never come to her. I do myself that justice."

"You need not misinterpret my words, if you please. Stany is very reserved, serious, cold. She would be incapable of rushing into an overwhelming sentiment from one day to the next, no matter who might be the cause; then she understands, also, that a simple little country miss is scarcely suited to such a man as yourself."

"There, now; you need not ridicule me," interrupted M. de Glenne vivaciously.

"Not at all. We are not of your world. I do not say that from humility; in my eyes one honest man is equal to another."

"In mine, also. And such a woman as Mlle. Vidal is superior to any other."

"I am very ready to believe that. When a treasure has been given us, let us protect it; and I seek to protect my daughter. She feels for you now nothing more than a sincere friendship, but you have just told me that you admire her ex-

tremely. If she should discover that, who knows the result? At least her serenity and tranquillity would be disturbed. It is a father's duty to prevent that which is too often the result of proximity and habit."

They had now reached the door of the Priourat.

"Good night," said M. de Glenne.

"Au revoir. I shall visit the Park more frequently. Will you not come in for a few minutes?"

"Thank you, it is quite late. You will kindly make my excuses to the young ladies."

Stany and Henriette, seated in the salon, heard the gate open.

"Here they are," said Henriette; then, listening more intently, she added: "Ah, Uncle is alone. Strange. He probably has something to say to you—something important. I will be one too many. Good luck, Stany," and she slipped noiselessly out of the room.

The doctor seemed surprised to find Stany alone.

"Where is Henriette?"

"She went upstairs to retire just a moment ago."

"Very well. All the better. I have strange news to tell you. M. de Glenne and myself have had a long conversation as we sauntered home. He has thrown some light upon questions that have annoyed me for some time. Would you believe that original individual had a wife somewhere? Yes—married; he is married."

This last phrase of the doctor's little speech produced an effect upon Stany totally unlooked for by her father. She arose abruptly, with a half-

stifled cry, stretched her hand toward the table as if to steady herself, while with the other she pressed her heart to still the palpitation that caused every drop of blood to leave her face and lips. Her eyes closed, and despite her brave efforts, she fell fainting in her father's arms.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN the poor child regained consciousness, she was lying upon the sofa, her father bending tenderly over her, holding a cloth saturated with vinegar to her nostrils. She felt as if she were awakening from a hideous dream.

"Well, well; what was the matter with my little girl? A fainting spell? I told you you were not well; that for several days you have not looked like your old self."

He had decided during the few moments he had spent in restoring her to consciousness, that he would never speak again with her upon the subject which had caused her such violent emotion.

"It is nothing, father, I am already better," she replied, making an effort to recall her strength. The blood rushed violently to her face at the thought of having permitted any one to suspect a secret now so culpable, but M. Vidal was determined not to suspect it, no matter what the cost might entail.

"You are right, my pet," he said; "it will amount to nothing; a little bromide and a good night's rest, and you will be all right. Your father, my dear, is your physician as well, and his intention is certainly to prescribe for you as he thinks best. Medicine does not signify a great deal; there are numerous cases where a change of

air is the only radical means of restoring one's waning vitality. Since that little fever you had last spring you have not been entirely yourself. You need a change of scene and a little distraction. Now you think I am saying that in sport; change of occupation is one of the best things in the world for one. I have been preparing a little surprise for you for some time, which will prove that I am not entirely selfish in regard to you. You have wanted for a long time to visit your god-mother in Paris; well, I am going to let you go. Now you are satisfied, I hope. Yes, you shall go. We will embrace the opportunity offered by the trip Madame Labusquette intends taking next week (Madame Labusquette was a relative of Madame Duranton). I shall put you in her care. Now, does that suit you? I did not wish to tell you of it until the last moment, but with such a pleasure as that in store for you, you will begin feeling better at once. It will never do to arrive in Paris with the appearance of an invalid, eh? There is no one but your poor papa who will be sacrificed this time—and you laugh about it, little ingrate; ah, such are the ways of children."

The brave old fellow embraced Stany, covering her face with kisses, inwardly applauding himself upon his little deception, while Stany was in no wise deceived, although she felt grateful for it. Pretending to believe in an entirely physical indisposition did away at once with any awkward explanation; to imagine this method of bringing about an absolutely essential separation between herself and M. de Glenne was the quintessence of affectionate delicacy. She kissed her father with

effusive tenderness, he was so good and thoughtful.

"Yes, yes; I am glad, so glad! but you will spoil me too much," and her heart felt near to bursting.

She had so longed for this trip to Paris once. Who could have predicted that when it came it would be accompanied by so keen a deception and such suffering! Stany, frail and delicate, had a strong, courageous soul within her. The next morning she found the strength to respond to the inquiries of Henriette, who came into her room early.

"Great news, indeed, and unexpected triumph—I am to visit my godmother." With affected gaiety she collected the gowns and essential accessories which went to make up her modest wardrobe, while her father explained to her cheerfully that she could purchase whatever she pleased in addition when she reached Paris. She was valiant and courageous to the last, accepting with religious resignation a heartrending catastrophe. She searched in her soul and saw that this love had almost expelled the devotion she had felt for her religion before it came; had almost expelled her thoughts of God, her mother and all the lofty aspirations she had felt, and which had at one time kept her from ever feeling lonely or unhappy. Unfortunately, now that she had eaten of the forbidden fruit; now that this affection had entered her heart, she was infinitely more miserable than she had ever been before. The blow which had felled her down like one dead at the feet of her father, revealed to him at the same time the depth of a passion which had gradually been gaining

ground for months. What a supreme test of a conscience such as hers! Her mother had written in her blue book that love was to be found in heaven, and it was dangerous to entice it to earth. She had given her love without knowing it, and now she was paying dearly for her few short hours of pleasure. She had no regrets, though, nor any desire to expel it from her heart; but it was necessary that no one should know of it—except, perhaps, her godmother. Perhaps this fairy godmother whom she was going to see would console her, enlighten her, and tell her what her mother might have said to her under the same circumstances.

Her curiosity in regard to Paris and Madame de Latour-Ambert had greatly diminished in comparison to what it had once been. Nothing could excite her now. She had tasted of the cup of love beside which all else is tepid and insipid. How had it all come about? Had she not dreamed it while the object of her exaltation was ignorant of such an absurd happening! In vain she sought any outspoken evidence upon which to base her belief; there was nothing but his looks, his tone of voice in addressing her, the evident necessity he felt to see her every day—in fact, a thousand little unsayable things. Of what use were words? Raoul had spoken to the doctor that the latter might come between, that he might offer a necessary resistance, an arm against himself. That was another proof that he loved her, otherwise he would not have feared her. Why else would he have sought to place this barrier between them? He felt the bitter necessity of doing his duty, and she

loved him the more for it, only duty should have necessitated his having spoken before. Yet his hesitation, his weakness appealed to her forcibly. He doubtless could not bring himself to it, until the cruel necessity and the last extremity demanded it.

M. de Glenne did not reappear at the Priourat before the hasty departure of Stany for Paris. Father and daughter bore up bravely under their first ordeal. It was the day before a separation to last for how long a time neither knew, that the doctor, no longer able to refrain from some little word or look, said, as he pressed his daughter closely to his heart:

"Forgive me, my dear one, forgive your father for not seeing nor understanding, for so poorly protecting you. It has been a terrible punishment for me."

The tears welled up in Stany's eyes and rolled down her cheeks—she who had heretofore looked upon life and death so firmly, now so weak.

"Papa, dear papa, let us speak only of Paris—I shall be there to-morrow. I shall write you about it, and when I come home," she added, still determined to persist in their little comedy, "you will see how well I shall be looking."

She asked with great firmness that the volume of Dante belonging to M. de Glenne be returned to him. Between the leaves she had pressed a little blossom of violet thyme, a voluntary offering this time. She marked the passage that had vibrated through so many sorrowing hearts. (There is no greater sorrow than to recall in suffering our days of happiness). She placed the blossom there,

feeling that she was committing a very bold action.

If, in reality, Raoul had preserved the little bouquet she had cast to one side at the Park, he would understand this little souvenir; otherwise, it would appear to him in the light of simple coincidence and mere nothing. After all, his conclusions mattered little, for Stany thought she was never to see him again. When she returned to the Priourat, doubtless he would have left the Park, with no intention of returning, not for years, at any rate. Everything certainly was at an end.

During the night, en route for Paris, she cried a great deal, hidden by the dark veil she wore about her face. Madame Labusquette, however, perceived it and felt a kind of pity for her.

"How the poor child loves her father, but, bah! childish affection—a few days of amusement in Paris she will have forgotten all about it."

Perhaps, too, a kind of secret envy slightly envenomed the ideas of this plain, simple woman of Nerac at the thought of the aristocratic entrée into the best circles in Paris, impossible for her, but open to Mlle. Vidal, whose godmother was a baroness, and M. de Latour-Ambert had been ambassador to more than one foreign court.

CHAPTER XIII.

No doubt it is a difficult thing to embody the ideal, and live up to the expectations of a young enthusiast, who, since she has been capable of thinking and reasoning, has thought and dreamed of you, endowing you with all possible perfection.

Madame de Latour-Ambert was the last person in the world to come off victorious under such a searchlight—at first sight, at least, for she lacked that seductive grace and winning manner so charming in the eyes of youth. Constance's first impression was one of vague disappointment. She knew her physique in a way, from a little water-color her mother had made of her in her youth. It depicted a very young person, a trifle florid, perhaps, but one whose animated expression lent to her countenance, if not beauty, at least the impression of it. She who guided the brush had carefully avoided reproducing that sort of harshness which comes of frowning, prominent eyebrows, and Stany was scarcely physiognomist enough to interpret in the signs of her low forehead, narrow lips, of the thin nostrils and general haughty expression, that universal dryness of all the features of her face. Then, too, at twenty, doubtless these characteristics of Marie de Vardes were less prominent; they had become more accentuated with age.

When she alighted from the train she little dreamed that this lady with the powdered hair, dressed with severe elegance, who was questioning one of the porters with such brief and frigid tones, was that Marie who had exerted such a decisive influence over the life of her mother. The effect she produced upon the daughter was entirely antagonistic. With the assistance of a tortoise-shell lorgnette, she inspected each apartment as it opened, stopping short suddenly, as if she had sustained a severe shock. Stany heard a smothered exclamation: "Marguerite!" Ignoring completely Madame Labusquette, who was profuse in courteous salutations, she drew Stany to her quickly, as the living image of that friend of other days, of her who had in reality been the one affection of her life. They exchanged very few words. Stany felt herself almost smothered in an embrace that the first aspect of Madame de Latour-Ambert had scarcely warranted. Already she was thinking to herself that sometimes very good fairies presented the appearance of witches. The only counterbalance to this notion was that her godmother was not really old. She was, unfortunately, at that ungrateful age when one's pretensions to beauty require the accentuation of goodness; that, to be frank, was nowise reflected in the brown, be-wrinkled countenance, which the shadow of her veil scarcely softened. Peevishness, discontent and disdain lay in each furrow created by a disappointed ambition. After addressing a word of thanks to the obliging person who had looked after the welfare of her charge during the trip, Madame directed the footman, who was standing

near, to attend to Mademoiselle's baggage, while she disappeared with Stany like an eagle with its prey. After the two were ensconced in Madame's coupé, which took its way rapidly toward the upper extremity of the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Baroness, with a sort of satisfied tenderness in her voice, said softly:

"At last—at last!" It was a moment she had wished for so long, and now it had come to pass. "Your father," she continued, with a touch of asperity in her voice, "your father finally consented. I had concluded that he intended to make excuses for all time, but I, my dear, have such great need of you."

Stany replied that it was more the child who felt the need of her godmother; she scarcely flattered herself that the need could be mutual.

"You talk just as she did," interrupted Madame de Latour-Ambert, "that same delicate, fresh accent, that same soft little laugh, when I used to reproach her for not being sufficiently gay—but she was taller."

"And so beautiful," said Stany.

"And you would scarcely be termed homely."

The pale lips of Madame parted in a kindly smile, to which they were little accustomed; her small, sharp, pointed teeth had remained very white and young beside her faded countenance.

"You must not be too modest," she continued; "we are your debtors; you are doing an act of charity in bringing some gaiety and youth into a home where everything bespeaks monotony and suffering. But that would be very tempting to you in case you inherit your mother's disposition as

well as her appearance; nothing but entire devotion to others ever occurred to her. I have never met any one else like her."

"Oh, my mother was a saint!" cried Stany.

"An amiable one. What a pity she married so far away," continued Madame, with an egotistical, inveterate return to herself.

Doubtless she forgot it was her own marriage which had caused Marguerite to return to Nerac.

"Your presence, *mignon*ne, will cheer two lonely old people," repeated the Baroness, and Stany added with a touch of melancholy:

"I will do my best."

She reflected that for the time being she was scarcely in a mood to cheer; that she had come rather in the hope of receiving advice and succor. Her friends seemed, on the contrary, entirely disposed to lean upon her. The rôle had simply been changed. Besides, the more she looked at her god-mother, the more she felt that it would be impossible to confide everything to her. The carriage continued its rapid pace, while within no sound broke the hurried rumble of the wheels; then, after a while, the Baroness spoke in a half tone of authority:

"As for you, my child, it is very important that you should see something of the world; otherwise, you run the risk, with such inexperience as yours, of taking a step you would regret always. Marriage is a very grave problem."

Stany colored vividly, as she thought that in all probability she would never marry.

"Most people call it a lottery," added Madame de Latour-Ambert. "It may be so, but it is far

better to risk nothing without knowing what you are doing." She sighed and Stany was not slow to understand the reason for it a few minutes later when she was presented to the baron.

He was a decrepid old man, who could lay no claim to being venerable. Despite his small figure, bent by infirmity, he still maintained what Mlle. de Vardes had at one time been pleased to term his "aristocratic bearing." It is a gift accorded to very few, and impossible to imitate. Buried as he was in his arm-chair and partially paralyzed, he still maintained the shadow of it. Unfortunately, however, that was scarcely a counterbalance for his extreme irritability and the sarcastic seasoning with which he peppered even his least significant remarks, the most of which were prompted by moody, bad humor. He arose when his wife entered the salon where he was dozing, announcing Constance Vidal in a high tone, for he was quite deaf, but his manner of summing up this young person bespoke the satisfied connoisseur.

"Charming," he mumbled; he spoke indistinctly, having no teeth, and he kissed her hand, although her glove still covered it. Stany had never been greeted in this fashion before; in fact, everything here was new and strange to her, but her innate refinement served her in good stead, and she evinced no surprise, seeking to appreciate and assimilate what she saw and heard as best she could.

The apartment occupied by the Latour-Ambert household was the first floor of a handsome building, looking into a garden on the one side and a

court upon the other; everything about their flat bespoke the fallen dynasty. Like tragic specters, the accumulated treasures of this ambassador of Napoleon III. grinned and forced themselves upon one from every nook. There was the Emperor pictured by Flandrin, with that strange, powerful look and fascinating manner; here sat the Empress, surrounded by her ladies in waiting, like Calypso in the midst of her nymphs—two fine copies; there a bust of the little Prince, with its sweet, gentle physiognomy, so little reconcilable with his horrible destiny; while scattered everywhere, upon tables, chairs and stands, were photographs and souvenirs of men of merit and fortune under the Second Empire. A glass cabinet enclosed numerous medals of different orders and jeweled tobacco boxes presented to the ambassador by different sovereigns. Stany grasped the names of those who had participated in our victories in Italy and the Crimea. The day of her arrival she was presented to a certain marechal, a contemporary of all these souvenirs, who seemed burdened with a funereal aspect, a kind of burial-ground appearance. Her youthful ideas were strangely impressed by the solemnity of all these relics of a bygone time, not so far distant, either, although the present generation disregards them in every respect. She remarked several other things in the course of this first day. Madame de Latour-Ambert occupied herself incessantly in her attentions to her husband. She made herself hoarse reading the papers to him, for that, he assured Stany, was his only recreation, although it was difficult to comprehend how he could derive much

comfort from a source that threw him into such violent fits of temper. He would vociferate, gesticulate, and give vent to all sorts of angry expressions which permitted Madame time to take breath, when she would continue her task until the irascible Baron had fallen to sleep. When he awoke, she was ready to accompany him for a drive or amuse him at piquet, which game was taken up several times a day. Madame de Latour-Ambert performed these duties very strictly, dutifully, but there was no feeling in their performance; her solicitude was neither spontaneous nor tender. She had been so always; very little affection is offered those incapable of returning it, and for this reason the influence she exerted had been purely intellectual. Now that the brain of the Baron had ceased to receive many impressions, there could be little congeniality between the two. Perhaps their union had never merited the name of marriage, such being a frequent occurrence.

Deprived of everything by the Revolution, which had lent him prestige, this poor septuagenarian had been reduced, with no saving clause, to the rôle of an invalid, while his ambitious wife found it difficult to pardon him for having fallen from his high estate.

In the prime of her life she found herself inseparably linked to a living corpse; to sustain herself in these days of trial, she lacked the resources of other women, that of reflecting upon hours of happiness in the past. Firmly, but not resignedly, she dragged the chain that was yet too stout to break. Perhaps across the Baron's clouded brain

there came secret impressions of the frigid punctuality with which his wife attended him, and perhaps he felt more resentment than gratitude toward her. Stany, far too ingenuous to comprehend this drama taking place beneath the surface of a routine, every-day life, appreciated very quickly that her mother had certainly been mistaken in Mlle. de Vardes, unless perhaps the **twenty or twenty-five** years of absence had enacted **one of** those prodigious transformations which defy recognition. But how could she explain to herself that the Baroness seemed so little like her letters? Stany scarcely appreciated that letter writing serves a great many women as authorship does others, as a mirror wherein they may be reflected, not as they really are, but as they should like to be, permitting them to dispose of the fantastic riches of Aladdin's cave, bedecking themselves the more liberally to counteract the falsity of the gems.

In the evening, when she went to her little room which adjoined the boudoir of her godmother, she felt one of those paroxysms that a tiny bird buffeted by the storm might feel when it sought refuge in a cave to remain captive. Nevertheless the "captors" were anticipating some pleasure for her. Madame came and sat on the foot of her bed, forming a thousand projects for her to see, without losing a moment, all there was in Paris worth seeing at this season of the year.

"What is more," she added with a determined nod of her head, "I shall not allow you to go back very soon, now that they have permitted you to

come. I shall allow myself the illusion of having a daughter of my own, a daughter (to intensify the pleasure) who resembles my friend."

She questioned Stany at great length upon all she remembered of her mother; at every response she repeated:

"Yes, that is it—she took everything seriously to the end; happy woman. Poor dear Marguerite! no earthly power could prevent her living in heaven and hanging up stars; real life in her eyes did not count for anything. It proves that when we live as we should, prompted by Christian motives, our souls are more active and beautiful." Once again Madame sighed and relapsed into silence. "Children—to be a mother! that must be heaven itself."

These last words were pronounced with an accent of passion and envy. Changing her tone, she questioned Stany in regard to her father, who seemed to inspire her with little sympathy; the hostility between them was mutual. She asked about their surroundings, their occupations, their neighbors. Scarcely knowing why, Stany avoided mentioning the name M. de Glenne.

"I see; no resources—a real little savage," said the Baroness, laughing, while her hand gently caressed the long brown hair trailing over the pillow. "We are going to enjoy ourselves together. Your first visit shall be to the dressmaker, the second to the Salon, for that closes in a couple of days, and to-morrow is the day for the opera. You are fond of music, I presume? But if you dared tell me what you like best of all after a

night on the cars, it would doubtless be a good sleep."

In fact, Stany's eyes were already half closed, and in a happy dream she was far away from her godmother, back near that Park where centered all her hopes and fears.

CHAPTER XIV.

VICTORINE, Madame's maid, employed the following morning so industriously, that even before the solemn interview with the dressmaker who was to transform this maid of Nerac into a real Parisian, she was in some shape to do honor to her godmother.

A few clever touches here and there served to eliminate the provincial appearance, as Mlle. Victorine expressed it, and an expression of *naïve* pleasure, such as a child with a new doll might experience, expressed itself upon the smiling face of the Baroness, as she took her way to the Champs-Élysées, accompanied by the most beautiful and charming of god-children. They walked to the Palais de l'Industrie, where the Salon was about to close, and from the moment they entered Stany's face attracted the attention of all whom they met.

"Diable!" said a well-known artist, as he passed them, "there is the greatest success of the Salon, including paintings and sculpture."

This sincere homage, in its brusque vivacity, passed unperceived by Stany; but Madame de Latour-Ambert was as pleased as if it had been directed to her. She felt herself entirely alive since she had taken this beautiful little thing under her charge. They walked about for a long time

through the almost deserted rooms, for the Salon, now so near its close, had ceased to be an attraction for most people. Stany was quiet, quite overcome by the number of pictures, and shocked or wounded in her delicate instincts by the barbarous pell-mell of good, bad and indifferent, in which, be it said, the bad predominated.

Madame, scarcely knowing how to interpret her silence, said to herself: "Has she not the sentiment of beauty? We shall see some day at the Louvre; she is evidently only overcome by awe here."

Several times Stany stopped before some sunny bright picture that reminded her of the Midi; she also asked the names of several people whose faces or manners pleased her. When it chanced to be a celebrity, Madame could name them, but she assured Stany that women of the world could only be known by the initials upon their livery. Suddenly Stany, all alertness, approached "La Cismaise." The few people who were in this room were assembled before a flaming, glaring canvas of Carolus Duran: a scarlet robe, harmonizing with the life-like blonde hair, through which a glint of that carmine on her lips seemed to reflect, while a row of sparkling white teeth shone like pearls from a jewel box.

The smile upon the lips mockingly raised at one corner, was a trifle daring; the eyes humid and coquettish, launched an ogling glance at the public over one shoulder, all from the shadow of an immense Gainsborough, laden with a forest of red plumes.

An uproarious portrait, an actress, perhaps; but

no, it had her armorial bearings in one corner, upon a double escutcheon.

"Ah," said Madame de Latour-Ambert, with a disdainful shrug of her shoulders, "she not only permitted but must have insisted upon parading the inscription of her name in full; she loses no occasion to flaunt it in the eyes of the public, as it is all she has left."

Turning the leaves of the catalogue she held in her hand, she pointed with the tip of her lorgnette to the words, "Countess R. de Glenne," when Stany in her surprise uttered a smothered exclamation.

"Chut," said her godmother quickly.

A young man, accompanied by a stylish woman, pretty but no longer young, who laughed loud with visible affectation, had usurped the space before the portrait, while he, with his feet wide apart and his cane under his nose, proceeded to criticise the picture with the too evident view of flattering the model.

"Say what you please, it is a calumny. The dress—I admit the dress is superb, but he has sacrificed the face. I will never admit that your face is a mere accessory to a red gown."

"You mocker," she replied purringly, while she tapped his fingers lightly with her fan. "You don't believe one word you are saying. That little woman is a hundred times prettier than I. I wish I could be sure I resembled her even a little."

The idlers about the apartment turned with curiosity to gaze alternately upon the model and the portrait—that curiosity which with the ma-

jority counts for a genuine interest in art. The ability to say they have seen a certain opera, or the original of a certain portrait, has more merit in their eyes than the quality of the music or execution. Stany looked, too; the violence of her sentiments astonished her. She hated this creature who, when *he* loved her, could not appreciate her good fortune; who in some way had rendered herself unworthy of him, and yet stood between him and any other affection like the insurmountable obstacle she was. Why had he loved her? What could have attracted him to this questionable beauty, vulgar in spite of her elegance and woman-of-the-world appearance. Stany observed her from head to foot, molded in a pretty fawn-colored jacket, which immodestly outlined her figure in comparison with so many well adjusted toilets, while the English collar enveloped an unusually long neck, and her golden hair was arranged in a massive coil beneath her hat. Her hand, perfectly gloved, clasped a much beribboned umbrella with an alpenstock handle; in rolling her eyes the better to judge of the resemblance, Madame de Glenne continued to laugh falsely and without motive. Everything she did and said had an air of falsity and grimace. The crude daylight streaming through the skylights exposed her powdered skin, the dry contours of her face and the outline of the kohl beneath the eyelash to enlarge the eyes and add brilliancy to them. Surely that flatterer must be making sport of her—no, he seemed quite taken, at least he was quite attentive; he published his good fortune as best he could.

While this woman laughed and coquetted, making capital of a name whose honor she had so poorly guarded, two sincere hearts suffered through her who forced them apart forever.

"*Mon Dieu*," said Madame de Latour-Ambert "how pale you are. What is the matter?"

"Nothing; I am only tired perhaps," responded Stany with much effort.

"In that case let us sit down." Madame drew her to a seat directly in front of the portrait, and having made her sit down, continued to scrutinize her closely, as if she would read to the bottom of her thoughts.

"Something frightened you suddenly. What was it?"

Stany felt it useless to tell a falsehood, and, more, the occasion was opportune for learning something of interest, and she replied with all the calmness she could command:

"I was surprised to find this Madame de Glenne here; that was all."

"How is that?—to find her? Do you know that person?"

"Oh, only at sight, and by reputation."

"It is a reputation such as would rarely be spoken of before a young girl."

"Ah! All I know is that she came into our vicinity once with the project of killing herself, an idea which she has long since forgotten, to judge by her gaiety this morning."

"What is that you are telling me? What hazard ever drew Madame de Glenne into your forsaken country?"

"Her husband lives there," replied Stany, with

an aplomb which belied the palpitation of her heart.

"Ah, you did not mention him yesterday in speaking of your neighbors."

"I must have overlooked him—probably."

Once more the piercing glance of the Baroness sounded the clear eyes of the child she was so determined to understand in a short time.

"A few years ago M. de Glenne was a very handsome man, very spiritual," she said; "I do not know if he is so still."

"You know him?" Stany asked quickly.

"Very slightly. My family was at one time allied with his. He is the son of a very original person and is very original himself. His marriage was a great mistake; it has cost him dearly."

"All the blame was upon the side of his wife, was it not?"

"Oh, entirely. She is a base, bad person. He should have obliged her to leave France; but, after all, that would be difficult. He preferred to go, banishing himself rather than meet her constantly, for she is everywhere if there is any publicity about it—at the theatre, in the Bois, every place; you saw her to-day. All the same, the remedy was heroic—to live in Nerac, for you said he lived there, did you not?"

"Not exactly at Nerac—at the Park, very near us."

"And your father receives him?"

"Yes, very frequently."

"He must have the reputation of a sphinx down there," insinuated the baroness.

"Why, there are many very intelligent men in our Midi, I assure you."

"It is very singular," continued Madame, after a pause; "very singular you did not mention him to me yesterday."

"But, godmother, I have just arrived here; I have many things left to tell you yet."

"I hope so. Come on, you are better now; you frightened me for an instant."

It seemed to Stany that the portrait in front of her was mocking her; the eyes looking over the shoulders seemed to say, "You got out of that very nicely, but everything is not at an end between us yet."

"Suppose we continue our walk," suggested Stany, anxious to get away from the portrait.

"Very willingly. We shall not be so warm down where the sculpture is; it is smothering here."

But once in the garden where the air was better, Stany found herself confronted with the same offensive vision. Upon a bench at the angle of one of the walks sat Madame de Glenne, alone now, with the air of a comedienne, who, fatigued from her rôle, profits by the moment when no one is watching her, to repose a few moments. Her foolish mask had fallen—her face, now that no effort at seduction animated it, was drawn and careworn; she had aged ten years. "Perhaps," thought Stany, "she is very miserable."

A sentiment of angelic pity slipped into her heart for this woman she could only consider in the light of an enemy. It was a sentiment she might have felt for any one suffering from a culpable conscience.

As they drove home, Madame de Latour-Ambert succeeded in fathoming the entire story of the tragedy at the Park; she questioned her very closely concerning M. de Glenne and ended by exclaiming:

"So your father decided from one day to the next to send you to Paris!"

As Stany grew purple under the cross-examination, she added:

"Ah, I have no wish to probe too deeply into his motives, so long as we profit by them."

But Stany felt vaguely that she had permitted her secret to be fathomed within the few short hours since her arrival, contrary to all her plans. Although her godmother was nearsighted, she seemed remarkably observing, but doubtless Madame appreciated that such a constant dreaming of sad thoughts in one so young was likely to be prompted by but one cause; some little heartache, or, worse, some deeper feeling, involved with obstacles that necessitated the smothering of it. She dwelt perseveringly on romantic subjects, discoursing at length upon marriage, and intimating that she would influence M. de Latour-Ambert, (who had no near relatives) to treat her as he would an adopted daughter, to facilitate the matter in a financial way; in fact, she succeeded, with her fine views, in frightening the child, and causing her to recede more closely within herself.

Stany's gentleness and intelligence gradually won her way into the heart of Madame de Latour-Ambert, who, before had been stupidly prejudiced against provincials, and could in nowise conform to the belief that they were other than nar-

row and ignorant. The Baron, too, was highly pleased with his wife's protégée, and never so satisfied as when she read to him with her clear young voice; it seemed as if he had miraculously ceased to be deaf when he listened to her. Stay was happy in rendering herself useful, and in feeling that she gave some pleasure; she was not insensible to the advantages derived from this visit, nor to the new scenes and interesting sights to be witnessed, but, in spite of herself, she felt the languor of disinclination toward it all, with the additional pangs of homesickness. Her soul, her thoughts constantly returned to the Priourat, and that newly awakened emotion, so futile, so hampered by circumstances, and withal so strong from the very force of impossibility. Everything recalled M. de Glenne to her thoughts—music, the theatre, the conversations she heard, in fact, a thousand details in this worldly, intellectual life with which she was now thrown in contact. If he could only be there, that they might see these things together. It seemed to her that she could get tenfold pleasure from it then; but nothing could ever rival those winter nights around the chimney corner at the Priourat. Paris held nothing one-half so delightful; she would have given anything to have lived even one of them over again. Alas, for that bygone time of dreams and hopes, of innocent pleasures, nothing could recall it now. There was little left but to train her soul to the sacrifice of duty.

Her father did not help her in the least; his letters often alluded to the neighbor, whom he should have refrained from mentioning out of pity to her.

He seemed to see as much of ~~him~~ as ever and to enjoy the visits as much as before.

How could she reconcile such heedlessness with the words of despair and repentance he had poured forth to her before her departure? He seemed happy and satisfied, and Stany read between the lines, "I can get on very nicely without you, so do not worry yourself on my account." Her heart quivered that she seemed scarcely missed. How long would this exile continue? When should she return? The circle in which she moved daily, seemed an inextricable maze. She exaggerated the attractions of the brilliant and vivacious women who frequented her godmother's salon. Those were the kind of people he was accustomed to; how should she interest him? Admitting that he had been lonely, and that there were no striking comparisons, he may have cared momentarily—but it was at an end now. He had forgotten her. It was right it should be so.

But Stany could not forget *him*. Each stranger who was presented to her fell under the disadvantage of comparison with M. de Glenne. She was quick to single out ever so trifling a fault, and to acknowledge to herself that no man she had met was worthy of comparison with him. She had seen, however, the cream of the social world, for while Madame declared she was tired of social functions, she abstained from giving them up; they enabled her to display her greatest talent, that of tactfully drawing people out; she excelled in this, and obtained the consequent satisfaction of gratified vanity. Each afternoon about five o'clock her friends were sure

of finding her not only at home, but surrounded by the enviable and desirable people; she possessed that art of eliminating the disagreeable, undesirable element, and of smothering any discordant jar that might have spoiled the charm of these informal gatherings. She was well informed upon current subjects; she had read the latest reviews and seen the latest things at the theatres; she was capable of conversing with any of the older diplomats who chose to discuss foreign politics, and questioning her literary friends upon subjects directly interesting to them; she was able, too, to make conversation where there was none; she was naturally clever, and contact with the world had sharpened her wits as keenly as a double-edged blade, so that her sallies were generally taking and sometimes redoubtable.

Before one of her friends, Madame de Latour-Ambert was humble; she hid her claws, as her husband maliciously termed it, before the Abbé Eudes, a name Stany had often found repeated with veneration upon the little copy-books left her by her mother, and written about the time of her confirmation in the Catholic faith.

He was in fact one of the oldest friends of the de Vardes family. He never appeared at the five o'clock reunions, but very often came in the morning to converse with Monsieur, and Madame was in the habit of saying:

“He will die well—I am sure of it. I am counting upon the Abbé Eudes to persuade him. He has never been hostile, *Dieu Merci* nor excessively incredulous; no, indeed—simply indifferent, like many others.”

Notwithstanding the assurance of Madame, who always had some great project in her head, Abbé Eudes came simply for the charitable purpose of giving a little diversion to the poor old Baron, who seemed to welcome him with such pleasure. He disliked Madame de Latour-Ambert's dominating manner, and his visits were seldom devoid of some little check put upon her in a kindly way; he usually asked for some money for his poor parishioners, too, in recalling to both Monsieur and Madame that by giving freely in charity they earned some pardon for the virtues in which they might be lacking.

This priest was a man of gigantic stature, a trifle bent with years, whose hair was white, and whose esthetic visage had an air of severity, but yet of intelligence and goodness.

The first time Stany had seen him, Madame had led her to him, saying:

"Does this child not recall to you something—or some one?"

He replied with a piercing glance that seemed to penetrate the outward beauty of the youthful face and search to the depths of her soul:

"She recalls the noblest, purest soul I have ever known."

"He alludes to your mother, my dear," said the Baroness.

From that instant Stany conceived for him who had instructed her mother in the intricacies of a new faith, a profound sympathy and respect. Whenever his visits were announced she would hasten to the salon, a thousand times more interested in his grave discourses than in the brilliant

wit of the evenings where so many subjects were discussed strange and vague to her, and in which she could find little diversion. It was all different with Abbé Eudes. The Baroness, entirely submerged in her ambition that her husband should die in the bosom of the Church, and seek the future world thoroughly armed with the "sacrament," led the Abbé adroitly upon religious subjects. Stany's young life had been so exclusively occupied with heavenly themes until a human passion had suddenly brought her thoughts to earth, that the first eloquent, intelligent priest she met served to recall all her old fervor, and she sought a refuge in it against all temptation; all the grain which was dried up or lost in the soil of the Baron's mind, fell upon well prepared ground in the soul of this child. With the sadness of a man who realizes that most of the virtues of the past exist to-day simply as phantoms decorated with false names, the Abbé dwelt upon the absolute necessity of stemming the tide of careless example gliding within every circle.

"Bah!" replied M. de Latour-Ambert, whose jaded mind was now and then awakened to a show of animation by the spirit of contradiction, "with all your fine talk, you will never resuscitate the apostles and martyrs."

"The apostles—I hope there are some to be found among our priests, else their efforts are vain mockery. We have occasion each day to battle with our conscience or our inclinations, and to defy wrong as bravely as they."

"Enemies scarcely to be compared with the lions of the pit, nor the pincers of the executioners,

Monsieur l'Abbé. Who would give their life for their faith to-day?"

"It sometimes happens that one has to give more than mere life, mere existence," replied the Abbé; "we have no scale for measuring *some* sacrifices."

These words of the good priest dwelt in the memory of Constance for a long time; they had impressed her, and they marked a firm decision in her mind—a decision suggested by the best of men.

"There is nothing that seems so cowardly, so little worthy to me," continued the priest, "as the effort some so-called Christians make to obtain their salvation at a bargain. I despise and condemn the subterfuges, the compromises with which some attempt to still their conscience by mechanically complying with certain restrictions. In order that we may feel the true spirit of divinity within us, we must have known the baptism of suffering, the sacrificing of ourselves for others. You may believe me, Monsieur, that baptism is equal to the martyrdom of old. As for circumventing the law, making it favorable to some cherished design of our own, for our worldly interests, it is odious; it is equivalent, in my estimation, to renouncing one's religion then and there."

"We must come to an understanding upon the word 'justice,'" said the Baron, who regained his vitality when there was any opportunity for an argument. "You know very well that the sense of a word changes according to our momentary needs. It is in the name of 'justice' that they are over-

throwing everything to-day and turning the world into topsy-turvydom, but they call it reform."

"I have not contended there were no reforms necessary."

"Then you approve of the republican institutions?"

"Why not? In the matter of government we have a very simple arrangement, 'give unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's.'"

"And obligatory education?"

"That does not appal me, provided that education is undenominational, provided it is not a mere synonym for heretical."

"And the pretended rights of women?"

"What rights?"

"The rights to diplomas of every sort, baccalaurate included; the right to enter all the professions, not excepting the law; the right to vote and to have divorce," laughed the Baroness. "That is probably what Monsieur de Latour-Ambert intends to say."

"Ah, gently," said the Abbé mildly. "Let women have equality that will not spoil them. If they are in earnest, they know what is necessary first; they know what makes good women, good wives, good mothers. Here is Mlle. Constance, who is very cultivated, and she does not shock me. As for the professions, eh? We shall be obliged to permit them to earn their living, if the money hunters will not marry them; but between a husband and a profession, none but the women of genius will hesitate, and they are very rare, very rare, *women of genius*."

"You forget the silly ones, who are more nu-

merous," interrupted Madame de Latour-Ambert with that same dry little laugh, which was a warning to those who knew her.

"Foolish women are an inconvenience everywhere, so let us pass them by. As for voting, I imagine even the most ambitious ones will content themselves for some time to come with persuading their husbands and sons to favor the one in whom they are personally interested. As for divorce——"

The Abbé halted a moment, then continued gravely:

"I confess that the law which has recently been re-established is a severe blow to the dignity of the marriage relation."

"I do not agree with you," replied Madame; "so few will care to profit by it. There is always a great clamor for certain reforms so long as they are considered impossible, and once they have come into effect the very ones who have advocated them seem anxious to shirk the responsibility of them. From the very spirit of contradiction a great many women will content themselves with their lot, now they have a loop hole if they care to employ it. It will be the general opinion that the palliation offered is an insult to the dignity of marriage, and the usual routine will continue to be lived up to by the nobler element; the real world will exclude divorces—you will see that the judicial separation will continue to be the remedy as in the past for unfortunate unions."

"Sorry remedy," pronounced the Abbé. "I wish the zeal of the reformers might deal with marriage itself, that it might become what nature and

the Church wished that it should be—love blessed and honored.”

“Ah, that golden age of love in marriage, if it ever existed, which I doubt, is farther from us than the time of the martyrs,” said Monsieur de Latour-Ambert, jeeringly. “They will find that harder to bring back than to marry conditionally and break the bonds when they cease to please; that is progress, and the Church will end by sustaining it.”

“Stop there, Monsieur le Baron,” said the Abbé. “The Church will always declare that those who profit by this law are inseparably cut off from her; she will leave them to God who made them, and to their triumph over principle.”

“But you must admit it is rather hard to compel people who hate one another to remain chained together like galley slaves.”

“Saint Paul foresaw the one fault which permits the breaking of that chain.”

Stany, who listened attentively, thought that M. de Glenne must have taken advantage of his legitimate right.

“But that is no reason for contracting other bonds,” continued the Abbé. “Their liberty should suffice.”

“You dispose of happiness very readily,” cried M. de Latour-Ambert.

“Are we in this world simply for the happiness we are to derive from it?”

“From the age I have attained, I begin to imagine not,” replied the invalid with a sneer; “thirty years ago I should have said yes—yes, a thousand times.”

"And I hope thirty years ago you would not have approved of divorce?"

"No, probably not, but I had no reasons for approving them. As for the Church," he persisted in his hardheaded way, "why should she not yield? She has given way already."

"Ah, through constraint and force—that does not count."

"She yielded with little pressure to legal separations, which amounts to the same thing."

"In certain decisive cases."

"Rather elastic ones, they say," the Baroness cried out in denial.

"Ah, Madame, gently; what do a few cases signify? One error, one complaisance proves nothing, except that wrong may accidentally triumph; it gives no reason for building a moral code from something radically wrong."

Discussions of this sort, touching upon religion and a religious point of view, were often coming up before Stany and giving strength to the decision she had made. She had often spoken alone with the priest and he had come to see that some obstacle lay in the pathway of her happiness, some obstacle that nearly trenched upon the ground of their frequent discussions, and he had spoken delicately, without seeming to have guessed her secret, of the remedies for such a wound.

He did not bid her renounce the sentiment that lent such depth to those beautiful eyes and shadowed her countenance with sadness, but he pointed out the grandeur of that sentiment transported to regions where nothing changes, where nothing ages, where everything merges in the divine being;

he told her that pure and disinterested love could replace for a soul that baptism of fire which the martyrs suffered. Stany came to see herself in a beautiful future, with whitened hair, and eyes inseparably fixed upon eternity, while none should guess the secret of her solitude.

It is not difficult to understand that in this frame of mind she met very coolly certain overtures upon the part of her godmother, having the definite purpose of retaining her near her in Paris, by a *marriage de convenance*.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER the season of the Grand Prix, Madame's five o'clock functions were transported to Saint-Germain, where a few who were still lingering in town sought her salon with persistent regularity.

Among this number, one young man was particularly remarkable for the zeal with which he undertook all manner of commissions for the ladies, and for the daily regularity of his visits.

The Baroness repeatedly called Stany's attention to his agreeable manners, and, more, his excellent social position; then too, his employment in a business which promised certain promotion, with an assured residence in Paris was worthy of consideration.

His "views" were extremely satisfactory, added to which he practised what he preached, which was a virtue threatening to become extinct in the male species. Stany listened patiently without contradicting her godmother, although she could but feel a little astonishment at the insistence with which Madame dwelt upon the merits of M. Julien des Rivoires, even to the lesser details of his religious convictions. Finally, Madame assumed that positive tone she employed in treating of any important affair, saying that this young man aspired to making Stany his wife. The response of the latter was embodied in a gesture of repulsion which left her godmother speechless.

"*Mon dieu!* what do you dislike about him?"

"Nothing."

"Perhaps then you will like him better after a little."

"Oh—never——"

"Shall I discourage any further advances?"

"Absolutely."

"You will not be likely to find another parti so eligible as he," said the Baroness, slightly irritated.

"No matter; I have no inclination toward matrimony."

"Which signifies that she loves some one who cannot marry her," thought Madame de Latour-Ambert, recalling several observations she had made since Stany's arrival. She thought it rather impertinent and ungrateful that Stany should refuse to accept such happiness (as Madame understood happiness) when it was offered her by such a far-seeing person as her godmother. As for Monsieur, the refusal met with his entire approval. Nothing called forth such intense pleasure with him as a rebuff administered to the ambition of certain youthful sprigs; he had been obliged to yield place to them as his years increased, but he had done it grudgingly.

There was an opinion, however, in which he seconded his wife vehemently; he protested loudly when Dr. Vidal appeared upon the scene as commanding officer to reclaim his daughter; the doctor felt he could get on without her no longer, he said, and besides, Henriette Duranton was resolved not to marry until her cousin should return to act as her maid of honor, and it was im-

possible to keep two such ardent lovers waiting indefinitely.

Everything about the doctor was offensive to the Latour-Amberts—his freedom of speech, his familiar manners, and his southern accent; he was possessed of a certain exuberance of manner or humor, and a slight brusqueness, but he was not entirely devoid of dignity.

"It is extraordinary," thought she who had been Marie de Vardes, "that Marguerite could marry such a man and not die of disappointment. She must have idealized this disproportionate union, as she did all else; the praises her letters always sung of him go to show she never really saw him as he is."

Madame de Latour-Ambert was singularly near-sighted in discovering merit where she choose to disbelieve in it; she could see no superiority beneath the somewhat uncouth exterior of Dr. Vidal, nor perceive what his wife had found lovable in the father of her child.

As for the doctor, he was thoroughly conversant with the imperious Marie, for she was the exact counterpart of the portrait M. Duranton had often drawn for him upon the mental canvas; but he felt a kind of generosity toward her, as happy people often do toward the misery of their less fortunate brothers and sisters.

His joy at seeing his child again was immeasurable,—it was only exceeded in intensity by the gladness of that child, to whom the separation had been a barren exile.

"You are dearer than ever," he repeated. "I don't know what has come over you, or if you

owe it to your godmother, but you are different—you are more as your mother was.”

She had, indeed, absorbed a certain refinement, a kind of superiority, from the contact with refining influences.

“To please him,” she said to herself, in thinking of M. de Glenne, “I must be so.” Doubtless she would never see him again, but he would always be everything to her; she desired to make herself worthy, even in her thoughts, by cultivating whatever should place her more upon a level with him; he, of course, would never know it, but she could only be happy in fulfilling, as nearly as might be, what his ideal really was.

That her father should be so pleased with what he chose to term her “fine airs” was a little astonishing; certainly there had been a time when he would have been the first to criticise them, but there was some puzzling change come over her father.

He had seemed so overcome at the time of her departure from the Priourat, and now his joy was intense when he was to take her back to scenes necessarily full of pain and sorrow to her?

Perhaps M. de Glenne had left the Park; the thought of it was overwhelming, but there was little left to hope except that it might be so. She dared probe no further into the mystery.

The Baroness, whose suspicions had grown apace since the refusal of M. des Rivoires, frankly opened the subject. While Stany was reading to the Baron, she led M. Vidal into a corner of the dainty garden which formed a part of the Saint-Germain establishment.

"Doctor," she said with the courage of despair, "my husband and I are resolved to do anything to defeat the giving up of your little girl. We feel the need of her in our solitude and declining years."

"And how, Madame, would you have me pass my declining ones?"

"There is nothing to prevent your coming to Paris."

"Pardon me, but all my interests, all my work keeps me there, and I would scarcely thrive, transplanted at my age."

"So long as your work is so absorbing you would not feel the void caused by Stany's remaining here a little longer. She will console us in the first place, and she shall inherit our property as a recompense."

The doctor made his habitual grimace.

"The dot I have set aside for her is sufficient; if I gave her none at all, I think she has every chance of being happy," he said with a peculiar smile.

"You do not talk seriously at all, if you will permit me to remark. We should love our children sufficiently to provide for their future to the very best of our poor ability."

"I am entirely of your opinion, and while I appreciate your kindness, it is because I think as you do that I am taking her home."

"Very well, bury the little pearl in oblivion, if you will have it so; here her value would have been appreciated, she would have had no difficulty in making an advantageous marriage."

"She will have no difficulty in that respect at home."

"I doubt very much if you can present a candidate as eligible as the one I have in view."

"Madame, that is a matter I shall leave to her. Have you convinced her yet?"

"Ah, just for the present she seems disinclined——"

"Well——"

"Mind you, sir, I say for the present. You must give her time to forget and to consider. In her interest I wanted to speak to you of that, alone."

The Baroness had lowered her voice, as if in the solitude of the garden any one could overhear her.

"Place a little confidence in the penetration of an old woman. She refuses because she has left at home some unfortunate inclination that still retains her fancy."

"Unfortunate—do you think so?"

"I am certain; we are more far-seeing in these matters than men. She is foolishly in love with one of your neighbors."

"I had an inkling of it."

"And you know who?"

"There is only one who counts."

"And he—is a married man."

"Madame, love scoffs at such trifles."

"How? Monsieur, you are certainly expressing some peculiar notions. Where do you expect such folly to lead her?"

"My dear Madame, your questions emanate from a personal disenchantment. We have all a right to our share of the sunshine; and so long as it continues, youth will never look beyond it."

"You are her father, and still you reason like that?"

"I hope to bring you to my way of looking at it, later, but it is too early now."

She could not coax beyond that standpoint, and from sheer impatience fell to speaking sharply of imprudent, selfish affections.

"I was protecting her from danger," she declared, "and you are leading her directly to it."

The doctor declared he was very far from misinterpreting this protection, and thanked her for it.

"But, Madame," he cried at last, "it is asking too much for me to make you a present of my daughter."

Later the Baroness had said to her husband, "I hate that man."

"My faith, he is equally displeasing to me," responded the Baron, with the pouting air of a child from whom one takes the toy that amuses it. "No one will ever read to me as she does; now I shall be obliged to fall back upon you again—she was agreeable to look upon, too."

"This rustic has had more than his share of good fortune," continued Madame de Latour-Ambert, so absorbed in her complaint that she failed to catch the disobliging phrases reflecting upon herself—"a wife such as poor Marguerite was, and a daughter like this one. It is *too* much that he should have had all that."

She hated the doctor for possessing what she had not and she reproached him for lending them such a treasure, for the mere pleasure of taking it away.

"Just a month or two longer—I will ask no more," she pleaded.

"Madame, your demands are still beyond me. I shall take her to-morrow, with your permission."

The Baroness took Stany to one side, and talked to her at great length, for "her good," against the dangers of her excitable nature, warning her that life was not all a romance, and that she would retain M. des Rivoires within call until she could reflect and consider matters at her leisure.

"That will not be difficult," she said, "for the poor fellow would not be discouraged because of one failure."

"My dear godmother, it is you I love, and it shall be for your pleasure alone when I return," said Stany gently, to put an end to the importuning.

She was interested merely in a secondary way as to the void her absence would cause at the Latour-Amberts; she was far more anxious and restless about the surprise awaiting her return, for there was a surprise; her father had said so with that mysterious air he had affected since their reunion. She had not dared question him, and they both had talked a great deal more than was necessary of the approaching marriage of Henriette.

CHAPTER XVI.

As she crossed the threshold of the Priourat, she felt her heartaches renewed with the presence of old associations.

To live there now, with no hope of seeing him again—it would be immeasurable cruelty. In Paris the novelty of her surroundings had drawn her thoughts from her suffering; there had been no souvenirs upon every turn to fix her thoughts immovably upon that one subject, but here they abounded, as a thousand phantoms, and dwelt about her so they drove all slumber from her couch the first night of her return.

She gave herself over to idle conjectures, wishing, yet fearing, to hear what Catinou could have told her at once had she been inclined; her malicious, wrinkled countenance had been full of it from the first. One question would have sufficed for the outpouring of the whole affair; that question Stany had shrunk from asking.

After a night spent in tossing feverishly upon her couch, she had risen with the first glimmering of dawn and sought her window, straining her eyes toward the Park, as if the first sunbeam would bring her a message from there. The silent country, still sleeping in the dim light, seemed burdened with sadness; vague autumnal odors, and the scent of the dahlias and chrysanthemums mounted toward her, while she leaned

immovable against the casement, framed in a bower of climbing roses, a light shawl protecting her from the slight chill of the early morn.

What was she waiting for? She hardly knew—something.

The daylight grew apace; she drew back at length, shivering, cold, and closed the window behind her. It was no longer early, and dressing herself, she descended to join her father, who was in a great hurry to be off to see if his patients had profited by his absence to recover. His apparently thoughtless gaiety shocked Constance a little, and breakfast over, she remounted to her room.

“Mademoiselle,” said Catinou at her door, “there is some one to see you below.”

Someone—how could that be? Some of the Durantons? No?—then likely some of her poor neighbors. She quietly descended, and entered the dining-room, where she habitually received these visits.

“Mademoiselle,” said Catinou, “they are in Monsieur’s study.”

She opened the door, but stood upon the threshold as one petrified, a half-uttered cry upon her lips; there he sat, Raoul de Glenne, as he had sat so often the winter before, but with a happiness upon his countenance she had never seen there before.

“Stany,” he said as he approached her; his voice was low and full of emotion, which gave a strange tone to the name by which he addressed her now, for the first time. A torpor seemed to have taken possession of her; she stood immova-

ble; had she sought to flee, it had been the same—she was powerless. It must be some mad dream, for she had no power to mind nor mend. Raoul had come very close to her; he took her hands, and with tender authority forced her to sit beside him on the divan, while he murmured tenderly:

“Dear, dear child, if you but knew how dearly I love you.”

She made a hasty movement to free herself from him, pale and terrified.

“Is it possible,” he said, “that your father has told you nothing?”

She shook her head.

“It lies with you to make my happiness; that we may never be separated; that you will be my wife.”

She must be dreaming, for that was an impossibility, she thought, but she closed her eyes, that the dream might not cease, for she dreaded to awaken.

“Your wife,” she said timidly, “and the other?” was the questioning glance lifted entreatingly to his, “what is to become of her?”

He understood and said:

“I am free—free to give you my name, and to love you till my life’s end; if it had not been so, you should never have seen me again—I should have kept myself from your pathway; I should have returned to that solitude to which I thought myself inured when we met. Since then such a change has come into my life; I was poor, indeed, without it. You have brought me the desire to be happy. In loving you as I do, I feel

as if I were obeying a divine command—do you understand me, dear? There are happenings that bear such prodigious results—as if they had emanated from a higher source than the will of man; it must be so—I have felt it from the first time I saw you in La Garenne—you were in the distance, like a beautiful, fugitive shadow of love; but now I have that shadow in my grasp—I shall not let it escape me.” He drew her closely to him in a transport of joy, and she did not shrink from him, while she could scarce comprehend this great happiness, almost a miracle.

“Tell me, darling, that I was not wrong, the day I thought, in such a turbulence of despair and joy, that I dared to hope you loved me.”

Again she raised her eyes to his, for she had scarcely moved them from the floor while he spoke to her in his tones of entreaty; a tear trembled like a diamond upon her long lashes. He brushed it away with a kiss, followed by another and then another, until the doctor’s return interrupted them. He announced himself at some distance by singing gaily and calling to Catinou, opening several doors with unusual vehemence; in brief, did not enter his study until he had allowed ample time for the re-establishment of a proper decorum.

“Well, well,” he said, in his most bantering tone, “do you still regret the candidate your god-mother proposed, my little Stany?” And as she blushing protested, he continued: “You see, they were plotting to keep her in Paris, but that would neither have suited me nor yourself, I fancy. I had considerable trouble to keep myself from tell-

ing her what awaited her, but I managed it; it was so much nicer to let you give her the surprise. You were surprised, hein, Stany? Own up."

So the dream was real. She no longer had to fear the awakening, and yet she could not shake off the feeling of restraint and foreboding. There was a lacking of clear outlines in this sketch of destiny. How had the other one disappeared so strangely, so a propos, as if some homicidal wish had killed her—as if fate had lent wings to a murderous hate. She felt a vague remorse, although she had never consciously given form to an evil thought toward that other woman who had crossed her pathway, but her conscience was tender and she almost believed herself the cause of some horrible misfortune to another, and that other a young woman almost as young as herself. She recalled her face as she had seen it a few months before at the Salon, suddenly saddened with an expression of weary lassitude. What had she been thinking of as she sat upon that couch within a few feet of Stany? Perhaps some means of proving, after all, that she was no comedienne, as he had said of her; perhaps, too, some wish to renew the attempt that had terminated so pitifully at the Park the first time.

Then suddenly the blood ran cold in her veins; it had come to her like a lightning stroke, but by its light it seemed to her that her father, and Raoul more than he, were heartless in giving full rein to their joy with the shadow of that other woman's life hanging over them like a great pall about their happiness.

But the joy of this new opening in her life came over her again and enveloped all her sentiments. What mattered the rest? She was to be his wife; he had slipped the engagement ring upon her finger; he was never to leave her now, never—never. And her duty from now until all should end for them both was to make him the happiest of men. Was it possible duty could be so sweet, so tempting, as tempting as forbidden fruit for the wicked! Ah, life was so beautiful; how did it happen some people were so blind, so wicked as to think it other than the most exquisite thing in the world? Her very heart was too small to hold all the happiness she felt, and it overflowed with joy. During the evening she sat beside Raoul with her hand nestling in his, while the lamps burned low, and the doctor, coming and going, leaving them to their sweet solitude now and again; such beautiful words he whispered to her that in her excess of felicity she felt that desire which comes to tender souls—a desire to sign this page of life while it ran so beautifully, and to die. She had reached the summit of all happiness and she feared the descent.

“Ah,” she said, “this day has seemed so beautiful, so grand, that should it be the only one I shall ever know, I must thank God for it.”

“Every day shall be like it; we have a whole host of them stretching before us so far away into the future I can see no end to them,” said Raoul with youthful tenderness.

He began to laugh.

“To think I was growing into the belief that I was getting to be an old man.”

Then finally the doctor put an end to their beautiful evening, but not without some effort; he insisted that after a long trip, careful people, with any respect for their health, should seek some repose; but before she retired Stany finished the letter she had begun to her godmother, telling her of the wonderful surprise that had awaited her, and she was so happy, so happy. It seemed as if she wrote merely to trace those words; she lingered so over them; it seemed to her those words had never looked so beautiful to any one before. The day after they had no time for tête-à-tête; all the Duranton family had hastened over to congratulate the future Madame de Glenne.

"I told you long ago," cried Henriette, "that you would end by marrying the Prince."

Horace Capdeveille, who was upon the eve of his own marriage, seemed very proud of the close relationship; the pastor concluded there was something really providential in the return of the Park into the bosom of the family; he forgot all his prejudices against de Glenne; we must show mercy to every sinner; the past was past, why recall it? Madame Duranton even deigned to smile. She thought her niece was making a very advantageous marriage, and did not hesitate to tell her so, and read her a lesson at the same time concerning the duties riches necessarily brought in their train.

"You will continue to live here, and to let us have Stany the same as we have always done?" asked Henriette.

"Certainly," responded M. de Glenne, who had his response ready for all these questions he had

foreseen, determined to meet them graciously and do as he pleased after. "We will change nothing; what is more, the only difference will be the reconciliation of a pessimist with his life."

He made himself extremely agreeable during dinner, entering into a polite discussion with the pastor upon Sallust du Bartas, whom the latter, in his inextinguishable enthusiasm for Gascon products, placed in advance of Ronsard, calling him an inspiration to Tasso and Milton—sustained moreover, in this opinion, by Goethe, who had called him the king of French poets; the pastor was of the opinion that little that was meritorious could emanate from any source but the Midi. M. de Glenne defended Ronsard with just enough animation to permit the pastor to win his debate with some *éclat*; he was in the humor to permit them to prove to him that night was day, so long as he could look opposite him into the beautiful face of his little fiancée. Stany responded blushing to his tender glances, and all the while her thoughts could but revert to that woman whose sudden end had permitted them to be what they were to one another, without which they should still be separated by the insurmountable obstacle of a life. This funereal idea had swept about and permeated every vestige of pleasure the entire evening through, and ended by dominating her to such an extent that after the departure of the guests she had said to her father, with a burst of spirit:

"I should like you to tell me something of the death of Madame de Glenne."

"Of her death?" said the doctor, who was light-

ing his candle preparatory to retiring. "Have you never spoken with him of the matter?"

"No—that is—barely. He told me he was free, with no other explanation, and I had not the courage to confide to him the fear that pursues me so constantly. You do not think, papa, do you?—you do not think she has killed herself for good this time, do you?"

The doctor began to laugh with a slight embarrassment.

"Ah, good; if that is what troubles you, reassure yourself. Those creatures do not kill themselves—la, la, my little innocent. She will have consoled herself already, I venture to say; perhaps she feels a little chagrin at having to renounce a name that gave her a certain prestige, but that will be more than balanced by the liberty she has regained. She will find other dupes, never worry, but that does not concern us now."

Stany had grown frightfully pale; she had tried feebly to interrupt the doctor with the same shred of a phrase each time, without being able to complete her thought.

"But in that case—in that case——"

"No, my love, be reassured; that venomous beast is not dead; it is simply that a law that has been dropped from our code since 1816 has been re-established—just at the hour when we needed it the most."

Stany could scarcely believe what she heard; it was like some frightful nightmare. She recalled the decree the Abbé Eudes had pronounced against—the divorce law: those who profit by it must separate themselves forever from the Church, for

the Church would never recognize such a monstrosity.

"Father," she said, very low, but with an expression of intense reproach, "you should have told me that."

"*Helas*; I neither told you that nor anything else. I left de Glenne to tell everything. What in the world were you talking about all of yesterday when I discreetly left you alone so often?"

She blushed to the roots of her hair.

"Of everything except the essential."

"You think so," said the doctor, carelessly; "he loves you, you love him—you both love each other—that is the essential from my point of view. I trust no scruple of bigotry will cause you to hesitate now."

She had lowered her head and did not respond.

"Are you going to accuse this unfortunate man of a crime because he permitted himself to be taken in the net of an adventuress when he was too young to have any discernment?"

"Oh, no, no."

"Do you pretend that the inviolability of the marriage vows should compel one person to live with another they loathe, and who has outraged their every sense of honor?"

"I would not dare to pronounce judgment upon so grave a question, but I see no reason why a husband should be obliged to keep a wife who has failed in all her duties."

"Then you can understand why they have separated?"

Stany inclined her head in sign of assent.

"Very well; it is only necessary, now that three

years have elapsed since they were granted a separation, that it should be changed to absolute divorce. De Glenne had not availed himself of the new law, because he had not thought of marriage, but after the little explanation we had together, he hastened to obey the necessary formality."

"What explanation?"

"The explanation that took place just previous to your trip, which resembled a flight more closely than anything else. That flight gave him some suspicions. He came here and begged me to tell him if he was in any way the cause of it; if he had involuntarily offended you; if he displeased you in some way. I was very careful not to tell him the truth, but he must have guessed it in some way. You do not know with what emotion he said to me: 'I am willing to leave this country, with one word from her, but she can retain me here forever also if she choose.' His frankness more than pleased me; I was moved, too, a good deal by his emotion, and, to be brief, as I knew your secret (for why did you faint from so clear a motive that evening?). As I was sure of your consent, I gave mine when he asked me for your hand, as he should do after the divorce had been granted. Nothing could be simpler."

It was horribly simple, certainly; all the complications lodged in the soul of Stany. Her voice would scarcely respond to her effort to speak when she finally said:

"There has been a misunderstanding—I must speak to M. de Glenne to-morrow."

"To-morrow? You forget Henriette is to be married to-morrow. There will scarcely be time."

"As soon as possible, at any rate—yes, as soon as possible." She made a movement as if she would go to her room, but the doctor detained her.

"Listen, Stany. Let us have no childish hesitancy. I am your father. I can wish for nothing but your good. Do not blot out your future for a mere foolish whim. You are satisfied, and the law is on your side. It permits you to marry legally, and raise your family with no tongue of reproach. What does the opinion of an antiquated set amount to which persists in pouting over this wise move of our legislation which other countries have recognized for years?"

"The world's opinion is a matter of indifference to me; it is not the world with which we have to deal."

"The one complication that could exist, namely, children by the first wife, are fortunately lacking in this case. We are fortunately without the pale of those coteries that wield such dire influence in the capital, as you saw while you were in Paris, no doubt. It hope, Stany, I trust, you are not so prejudiced as to consider the marriage at the Church the only legal one. Can that be so?"

"I believe it is the only one that signifies, morally speaking."

"My dear little girl, if you should content yourself with that alone, you would never be recognized as a wife in the eyes of the world."

"I should still have the blessing of God. But that is not the question; everybody submits to the civil marriage."

"And you seem to look upon that very lightly, it seems to me."

"No, it has its use, no doubt; it regulates the civil position as the contract regulates the money question."

"And one's civil position amounts to something, it seems to me," said the doctor, stroking the cheek of his little rebel lightly. "What difference can it make, after all, when you have given your heart?"

"God will be lacking for me," said Stany gravely.

"*Dieu! Dieu!* Now I see you have been burning yourself anew in that fire of intolerance at your godmother's. The most exacting God imaginable can ask nothing more of us than that we should be honest and pure in our lives. Do you suppose that the blessing of one or more priests will make your husband love you the more, or live up to his part of the contract with any more regularity?"

"I should have confidence in M. de Glenne if he should promise me nothing."

"There, that is better."

"But a ceremony in which religion has no part is null," added Stany with persistence.

"A curse upon this Baroness, instrument of the devil!" cried the doctor with fury. "If it had not been for her meddling, your mother would have remained a Huguenot; you would not be seeking the impossible, and the benediction upon which you place such a store could have been pronounced by your Uncle Duranton."

"Does my uncle know about it?" asked Stany quickly.

"Your uncle does not even know that M. de

Glenne has ever been married; I did not consider it necessary to take the advice of everybody."

"Mine should have been asked," said Stany severely.

"Do you mean to say you would have refused that which you longed for so clearly; that which you still long for more than anything else?"

"My father," she said, taking a candle in her trembling hands, while they both stood talking at the foot of the stairs, each in a tremor of agitation—he trembling and red from anger; she pale as death—"my father, do you suppose that my dear mother—who, I feel sure, is looking down upon us both as we stand here now—do you suppose she would have married you without this formality in a religious way?"

"The situation was not in the least to be compared to this one," replied the doctor, slightly embarrassed. "It was nothing to me—but we could stand here and discuss until to-morrow and come to no agreement. Come, let us go to bed; sleep will bring counsel."

He kissed her on the forehead, but it seemed to him that the poor, pale little head had turned involuntarily away, as if to escape this habitual caress; he recalled, suddenly, a similar movement upon the part of his wife after a painful difference they had had about the time of Stany's first communion, and he breathed a deep sigh, thinking of the distances this question of faith could create between two loving hearts, all in all to one another.

"The stronger is generally vanquished by the weaker," he thought, "for compassion moves them

to it. But this case is different, she loves him.”
He laughed a defiant laugh as he got into bed.
“Bah! the black robes may say what they please,
love will conquer this time; poor de Glenne is
safe.”

CHAPTER XVII.

M. DE GLENNE was to come the next day in his carriage and take them to Nerac for the wedding. When he beheld Stany he was greatly shocked to see the great change a short time had made in her. Her face was sad and bore every trace of bitter suffering.

One night of grief had wrought as great a change in her as if she had undergone weeks of physical pain. The delicate rose of the simple toilet she wore in honor of the occasion made her look even paler from the contrast; even the contour of her face seemed hardened by the great conflict, and lent her features a tragic expression; her eyes still bore the trace of recent tears; no maid of honor ever looked less radiant, or less suited to the rôle in which she was to appear.

"*Grand Dieu!* what is the matter?" cried de Glenne when he saw her.

She excused her appearance by pleading a violent headache, and her father seemed to coincide with her.

"You must shake that off, my dear, and think as little of it as possible," he said.

The horses sped away with them, trotting rapidly along the highway, beneath a brilliant sun,—just such a sun as makes a bride believe the whole universe is interested in her personal happiness.

Henriette was infinitely gracious in her furbelows of white satin and tulle; her rosy face all dimples and smiles beneath the long white veil; she was even pretty, and charmingly at ease.

Every one thought she had never looked so well before, and on the other hand, the remark was quite as general that the beautiful Mlle. Vidal was not pretty at all this morning. She certainly had gained nothing, whispered the envious, by purchasing her gowns in Paris; on the contrary, she never looked worse. The news of her engagement to M. de Glenne was pretty generally noised about, and many an envious glance was turned upon him.

"Just look at Constance," whispered Madame Labusquette in the ear of one of her friends; "it is questionable if it is not bad luck instead of good that has fallen from the clouds upon him. I can't understand it. He is very rich."

Stany, however, was following every detail of the ceremony with a sad interest. She had never assisted at a civil marriage before, and it was, as she had imagined it to be, a feeble imitation of the religious one, and made but little impression upon her; to assure herself that Henriette thought as she did, she spoke to her abruptly as they left the town hall.

"Now, Madame, here you are irrevocably bound; if your husband chose to take you away immediately, you could not remonstrate, for he is master now."

"I should like to see him pretend to such a right," responded the new Madame Capdeveille; "we are no more married than we were yesterday."

If Horace should say we were, we would have our first quarrel now, without waiting another instant."

Horace, who was weighed down in a heavy new black suit, responded to this aggressive sally by saying:

"Women have no respect whatever for the civil code." But in reality he coincided in the sentiments Henriette had expressed, for he added without delay, "All the same, it is one step forward; but two bonds are better than one. We can't rely entirely upon the first, either in the eyes of the world, nor in our own. Hurry up, Henriette, that we may the sooner get through with the second."

In spite of the bareness of the temple and of the simplicity of the Protestant service, all the pomp and emotion of the day was reserved for the religious ceremony. The jovial and happy face of the young bridegroom became serious and grave, while tears sprang to the eyes of Henriette during the discourse in which the pastor cautioned them to remember God in the midst of their trials and their pleasures, to consider their mutual affection as the means God gave them for purifying their souls and bringing them nearer to him, to look up to Him as the source of this affection.

The pastor elaborated upon the text taken from St. Paul, "We live in God; we act in God, and we are of God."

He contrasted the horror and emptiness of the life of the present century, deprived of the infinite, having no other destiny than the satisfying of selfish passions, with that life wherein

the Christian undertook to bring heaven down to this earth; for, he said, it lies with us to perform this miracle; heaven is localized nowhere, it is neither above nor below; it is a state that begins in this world for those who are pure in heart. Nothing could have been more touching than the discourse M. Duranton gave, partaking, as it did, of the sermon and paternal benediction united.

Stany saw her Uncle Duranton in a different light from heretofore; he had appeared so often to her burdened with worldly cares, which she had always thought submerged his sacerdotal dignity, led, as he had been, by his wife, and succeeding so poorly in conducting his army of children; but the minister of the gospel was to be found when necessity called, for she had had the proof of it to-day. What would he say in regard to her situation? thought Stany. "Ah, what a privileged person Henriette was to be able to walk henceforth beside the husband of her choice, with no importunate figure to glide between them, mocking and menacing, impossible to repulse, like the figure Stany always saw so clearly between herself and Raoul, forbidding her to approach him. The sacred texts were thundering in her ears, those texts wherein a husband is forbidden to separate from his wife, and in which it is forbidden to all men to put asunder that which God hath joined together. By a humiliating association of ideas she could but contrast with this young couple before her, surrounded, as they were, with friends, and burdened with congratulations, another cou-

ple who lived in the neighborhood of the Priou-rat in a scandalous connection, the shame of all the village—for the woman had a former husband in prison somewhere. She recalled the miserable lot of the children of these outcasts, mistreated, insulted, burdened with wretched names by the other pupils in the school. "What difference," she asked herself, "would God make between these people and herself?" She felt a pitiless voice respond "none," except the sanction of lax laws invented by men, a cowardly complaisance for which the world has been cursed—that is all the difference there would be between them; that is all the advantage she would have, if, indeed, it were an advantage, for the shame and public censure were really beneficial; they helped to expiate the fault.

"Never," she murmured to herself, as she knelt for a last prayer, in which she fervently prayed for the strength to pass by this temptation, and to be worthy of that God who so cruelly lighted the path before her.

The mirage had vanished; one brutal word had dissipated it, and that word had come from her father.

"You seem to be suffering more intensely every moment," said Raoul, as they walked side by side to M. Duranton's home. "You are making too brave an effort. You will pay for it later. Must you really expose yourself to the long wedding breakfast?"

"No; my aunt suggested that I go to her room, to rest, and I accepted," she replied briefly. "Listen; as soon as the opportunity presents itself,

you must hurry away; you must——” some one rejoined them, and Constance added hurriedly: “Come to La Garenne, to the fountain Saint-Jean—they have promised to leave me quiet, and I will be there.”

He replied by an inclination of his head, tempted by the rendezvous, and troubled by the manner in which she had given it—so briefly, without a smile, and accompanied by an imperious glance.

Everything at the Duranton home was graciously bedecked—that home usually so foreign to little feminine coquetry, or even to a symmetrical arrangement; garlands of myrtle and box festooned the walls of the dining room, partially hiding the dilapidated state of the papering; a bountiful menu did honor to the combined efforts of several *cordons-bleu*, called upon in honor of the occasion. The inimitable pastries, pies and fat spring chickens were washed down with an old wine that loosened every tongue, and the conversation was already general, and only those gained a listener who had the ablest vocal organs. Amid the prevailing mirth, the pastor returning to a bygone custom, in imitation of the prowess of his dear du Bartas, who, upon the occasion of the solemn entrance of Marguerite into Nerac, had caused three nymphs to address her in three different tongues—Latin, French and Gasconne.

He pronounced a triple epithalame, a trifle long, perhaps, but applauded to the echo. The health of the bride and groom was now offered in prose and verse.

M. de Glenne tried valiantly to enter into the general gaiety; the doctor made no effort whatever; he was somber and preoccupied; his long face was ascribed to the illness of Constance. At the beginning every one had loudly lamented the absence of the maid of honor, obliged from indisposition to withdraw from the festivities of a wedding day. The first course had passed with this accompaniment, but as it was, after all, a secondary incident, lost sight of in the general hilarity which followed, Raoul found it an easy matter to slip away before the coffee had been served. He asked the doctor, in a rapid conversation, to say that he had been called home upon an urgent affair, and to explain to these people, who were already a little under the influence of the wine, that it was the style in Paris, no one knew why, to slip away à l'Anglaise.

La Garenne was less frequented than usual, and for almost an hour Constance had been reposing beneath the trees that sheltered the fountain Saint-Jean, while every one thought her lying above stairs upon the bed of her aunt. She had thrown a dust cloak over her light costume, and it covered her so completely as to shield her from any curious observation. Of what had she been thinking all this time, her eyes turned upon the Baise dreamily, listening to the faint sound of the running water? Perhaps of those tragic amours which terminate in death, as had those of Fleurette, the rustic Ophelia, drowned within two steps of where she sat; certainly she dreamed a great deal of her own history, begun in this very spot the day she had dubbed "impertinent"

that first glance Raoul had bestowed upon her. It was a different season then, and the red and yellow leaves that hung so lightly upon the tops of the oaks and willows had barely begun to bud, and the nightingale of those days was dead long ago—long ago, for it had been two years since that first encounter in the month of April. Could it be possible? How short those eighteen months had been, yet filled with such gladness that they seemed like a lifetime to her, and it was a lifetime of love; it had enveloped her completely, and now she had fallen from her heaven and could never enter again.

A gust of wind shook the branches above her head, and the bright autumn leaves fell about her and swirled away toward the end of the avenue. Where were they flying, those fugitives? They knew no more than she, and she was as helpless as they to direct her destiny, without Raoul. Alas, it seemed too bitter; and then she recalled her words one beautiful, happy day, when the strange desire to stop the hands of time, and die before she should be less happy. If that day was to be the happiest day she was ever to know, she should still thank God for it. What foolish words! What would she give never to have known such happiness, only to see it vanish, never to return! Had the ability to choose been given her, she scarcely knew what her choice would have been; her thoughts were so random now; she felt them surging about her like the leaves without the power to interfere with them. Some one passed behind the bench upon which she was seated, a hand was laid upon her shoulder; she turned

with a shudder. She encountered the eyes of Raoul, filled with desolation and fear.

"I implore you not to recall the promise you have given me—it would be too cruel, too grave. I cannot say what the consequences might be."

A sudden spirit of bravery passed over her, and she replied with a touch of indignation, though her voice was low and hardly firm:

"I gave myself to a man who pretended to be free."

"Listen, Stany; I can bear anything rather than this accusation of having willingly deceived you," and he seated himself upon the bench beside her. "I have acted loyally. I told your father of my secret, of my past life, that he might know the kind of man he was receiving beneath his roof—that he might tell you of it. I had no other thoughts. This new divorce law awakened no hopes within me; part of my life—the part where I mingled with the world—was passed amid a coterie where the change in the statue will make no difference; that is to say, amid people who cling to the religious *forms*, while they pay little attention to it beyond the mere appearance. I had some of that feeling left within me still, I think, for the thought of profiting by the new law to prevent that woman from bearing my name and flaunting it to the four winds really never occurred to me. Your father, seeing the bitter effect your departure had had upon me, and knowing that——" Raoul hesitated.

"Yes," said Constance, "I was a traitor to myself."

Raoul took her hand that lay beside him and

raised it to his lips. She continued without noticing this caress:

"Then it was my father who suggested——"

"He saw my suffering and had pity upon me——"

"He pitied me, too, poor father. He did not stop at the barrier which meant nothing to him; he would even have felt a secret satisfaction at having me ignore it, too. But you—how could you forget that I am a Catholic? You are one, too. "Ah, yes," she hastened to say, upon a gesture from him, half negative in spirit, "you are one in name only; but at least you have been a soldier—how do you look upon a deserter?"

"I shall never believe that any just law can restrain two people who love as sincerely as we, who have no duties to any one but ourselves, from a marriage that would make the happiness of them both."

"Duty toward no one?"

"It has been ten years since the woman I have a horror of mentioning before you ceased to exist for me. My marriage with her was a culpable fault. The only real marriage seems to me to mean the union of two hearts. God would bless such a union, Stany, if there were no temple or priest to bless it. Do not belittle the goodness and mercy of God."

She listened to him tremblingly. What if his sophisms were really right and the education she had received went for nothing? He was so superior to her in every respect.

"You seem to care very little for the exterior forms of religion," she said.

"Very little. What little is worthy of the attention of God, provided Providence occupies itself with us at all, is what takes place in the depths of our souls. As for the rest——"

Then suddenly it seemed to Stany that the Abbé Eudes was standing beside her, and she recalled a few words he had spoken once in her presence, word for word: "It was very little they asked of the Christians of old, merely an exterior sign, merely the burning of a few grains of incense before an idol. They preferred death."

She had raised her head proudly, and, pale as a ghost, like a virgin of old, who rather than sacrifice to that which their executioners called Gods, preferred to descend into the arena and be devoured.

"I never thought you were a fanatic," said Raoul, frightened by the expression upon her face.

"Nor am I, for I would not condemn a woman for doing what you are asking me to do. Ah, no; I could not condemn her," and her voice grew tender, as if she sought all excuses for this imaginary criminal. "But for me, I cannot—no, I cannot."

"Because you are selfish—because you do not know what it means to love!" cried Raoul passionately.

He had risen and stood looking down upon her with a glance that made her shudder and grow paler yet, if possible.

"I am going; I shall leave you to your imperturbable peace, which seems to be dearer to you than anything else in the world."

She laid a trembling hand upon his arm.

"Ah, do not talk so—do not, I pray you; you would not kill me. Ah, Raoul, can you not see what I am suffering?" and she burst into a flood of tears.

He was convinced. The sight of those eyes bathed in tears, the despair in her childish voice, the gesture of this drowning woman who clung to the one shred of hope—all had rushed into his heart and silenced his voice of complaint. He drew her toward the bench, and sat down beside her again. She was still sobbing.

"Can you not see what it means, Constance, to awaken so suddenly from such a beautiful dream? I was wrong, perhaps, to place too much confidence in your father when he said 'have confidence,' thinking he knew you well enough not to lend me false hope. Which one has been the most deceived?"

"Neither one nor the other," she said softly, "since we love each other. But my situation is unusual, you admit. Generally a girl has her family to protect her from herself. I—I have no one; my father has been the first to break through what I consider my duty. Spare me; be generous; be patient; leave me the time to look clearly into my own mind. There is one thing of which I feel certain, that is, that God is too good to permit that all should be at an end for us."

"What must I do?" said Raoul, abandoning his future to the feeble little hands that he kissed wildly.

"Go away, under one pretext or another; I cannot leave here again."

"Must it be for long?"

He was at the mercy of this child and, sad as she was, she felt the necessity of enforcing her command.

"You will send me one word the day these phantoms that separate us will have vanished, for they are mere phantoms."

She smiled sadly, but did not reply.

"Good by, my father will be looking everywhere for me." She was already a few feet away from him; she turned back and threw him a kiss, and then hurried on rapidly, almost running. He followed her with his eyes, recalling how he had first met her beneath these trees coming toward him like the child of fortune and bringing a gladness into his life he had long ceased to hope for. Was this joy leaving him now forever? No; but he must wait until her mind could grow accustomed to a marriage slightly different from most. He would write her all he had not had an opportunity to say to her; the impression would only be the stronger. Then he had the doctor as an ally.

Although he chafed against this unexpected obstacle, which suddenly sprang up before him and barred the road, he felt that she loved him. The certainty intermingled with her decision in a delicious and cruel impression. She had ensnared him like a little sorceress, she had conquered him, formidable adversary that he was. She had spoken of desertion. Yes, but desertion seemed infinitely sweet to him if it might be in his favor.

Stany had already reached the house, where she

had entered by a side door unobserved in the midst of the clamor of the guests. They were dancing in the salon and in the garden with the abandon all lack of formality generates.

"You have passed a sorry day, while we have been amusing ourselves, *ma chere*," said Henriette, embracing her.

But she was too full of gaiety and the pleasure of going to take possession of a little home all her own to permit the cares of another to weigh heavily upon her, in spite of the love she felt for her cousin.

"I shall be more 'vaillante' at your wedding," she added, never dreaming that she was plunging a poniard into the heart she meant to cheer. "Let us hope you will not make us wait a long time, eh?"

Stany murmured that nothing definite had been arranged as yet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IF Constance had counted upon any support other than from her own conscience, she was to be bitterly disillusionized. Her godmother left her entirely at sea in this matter, although she could frame no excuse for her negligence and had almost come to think it indifference. Perhaps the doctor had requested Madame de Latour-Ambert to refrain from meddling with a question where he considered no outsider had a right to intrude. In reality the mixture of religious scruples and worldly wisdom alone prevented the Baroness from replying to a question upon which she was not prepared to give a positive answer. She never replied at all. Perhaps she was beginning to realize the far-reaching effect of her influence upon the mother, and to realize it with a feeling of repentance, and preferred to shirk all responsibility in this matter.

If Marguerite Duranton had not renounced her early religion her daughter would have been a Protestant, and free to give her hand to a worthy man whose worldly position and wealth argued greatly with the Baroness. She shrank from intervening in the destiny of this child again, for her early influence was responsible now for all the complications that had arisen. It became painfully evident that every individual should seek

to live his own life and leave the fortunes of every other to himself. Madame de Latour-Ambert was learning to reason with herself a little late in life, but it was little better after all than the philosophy of egotism. She wrote to Dr. Vidal and assured him that Stany would be much better off with her, and more likely to forget this first attachment, than she would by remaining in the neighborhood where the affair had all been enacted; and that probably in time she could marry her advantageously after she had forgotten this lamentable affair in a measure. But to Stany the idea of regaining through her godmother the few worldly advantages she renounced with this marriage, was infinitely repulsive. Abbé Eudes wrote her more touchingly than the others, but cold theological arguments were not very eloquent compared to the pleading of the love in her heart.

The judgment of the Church was not a wavering one, and she could hope for no alteration in it, but no priest dare tell her that in following her duty, painful as it was, she would eventually procure herself any happiness; she was trampling her heart beneath her feet, and she knew full well it could never be brought to love again. What did Abbé Eudes know of such love as hers?—a love wherein her own life counted so lightly she would willingly have laid it down to know that Raoul might always be happy. The poor curé of the village knew nothing of her suffering, either, in spite of all his goodness—because of his goodness, perhaps, for none know the bitterness of a broken heart but those who have experienced it. How was he to understand that in dilating upon the

mental and moral agony of spirit she would endure, once married to a man after such a manner, and scorned by the world—how was he to know that he was tempting her to step beyond these restrictions in the belief that the worldly suffering would compensate for the worldly sin? She could endure anything for Raoul.

The mystical tendency of her imagination led her to dream often of a new species of martyrdom, a huge, burning mass of timbers into which she should be thrown with all that she had cherished so fondly until now—all her convictions, her hopes, her principles. How many times had this sentiment impelled her to write a burning message of recall to Raoul which she never sent, for once regaining her equilibrium each time she tore it up and threw it to the four winds, responding to her frequent messages from Italy with platonic tenderness.

M. de Glenne was waiting at Florence not entirely discouraged, for he thought he could distinguish in Stany's letters a sort of gradual relenting; he followed his historic researches to help pass the tedium of exile, and sarcastically likened himself to Jacob tending the sheep to merit the hand of Rachel. He did not imagine, however, that the test would require fourteen years. His letters were full of tenderness, and full of a future wherein he persisted in seeing her as his wife, walking side by side through life's pathway—a pathway rendered joyous and beautiful by a mutual love, a love that increased with their years, instead of diminishing.

After his first violent outburst of temper, the

doctor had refrained from mentioning the subject again; perhaps he saw that his voice in the matter merely lent determination to this little girl, struggling with the impulses of her heart. It was curious; he had not believed at first that the struggle could be of such duration. He had hardly credited Stany with sufficient determination.

Many times Constance had looked up to find her father's glance fixed curiously upon her with that attentive air he had in examining some curious new specimen he had found in his rambles through the woods, and one he could not classify. Evidently he thought her slightly fanatical, perhaps a little worse, but he said nothing. The Durantons were relatively reserved and discreet, too; the pastor seemed to shirk any opportunity to speak to her alone. Madame Duranton would launch an innuendo now and then, over the top of her crocheting, about the absurd rigor of Papistry binding and chaining its children against their will. She did not favor divorces amongst Protestants, certainly not, but the horror she felt for Catholics rendered her very liberal at times.

As for the naïve Henriette, she launched forth upon the joys of marriage with the most charitable regret in the world that Constance was to be deprived of so much happiness.

Thrown upon her own resources, and to the cherished letters which she wore to shreds in her pocket and beneath her palpitating heart at night, she seemed to be gradually growing less determined. First, she had stopped consulting those little blue books of her mother's so frequently; then she had avoided even opening the little desk

that had held them for all these years; she even lost the key as a safe precaution. Her letters to the Abbé Eudes had almost ceased; on the other hand, she wrote to Raoul with unceasing regularity. In reality, she seemed to be giving herself over to the current that was inevitably dragging her toward her destiny.

It had been probably six weeks since the marriage of Henriette, when the doctor found her more nervous and upset than usual one day, and upon inquiry found that she wanted Bereto to drive her to Nerac. The order was given at once. Stany gave herself no time for reflection; the preceding night, while her heart had wandered in the darkness of disappointment there had suddenly come to her a strange thought, like a flash from the depths,—a light she hardly dared question for fear it might depart and leave her more desolately alone than before. She gave herself up to it gladly, unquestioningly. She could scarcely wait to put it into execution.

“My uncle,” she thought, “will encourage me and lend me a helping hand.” In fact, she had Bereto drive her directly to the Duranton’s.

The pastor was alone, preparing his sermon for the following Sunday, in the midst of a pile of papers from which he had been gleaning a text. When she walked in upon him so unexpectedly he was visibly annoyed.

“You see, my child,” he said, “I was obliged to give the boys a holiday in order to get a little peace; their mother has taken them to Henriette’s, and I was here alone, not expecting any company, trying to profit by the quietude to do a little nec-

essary work. A family is a great blessing, I think, but we must admit that they very often interfere with our more serious undertakings."

"That is to say, uncle, that I am in your way."

"What an idea! not at all. I am speaking entirely of those children who compel me to commit the sin of getting into a great temper, often, I fear. Perhaps you want to see your aunt? Shall I send and fetch her, or would you prefer going to her?"

"No, uncle, you are not to be rid of me quite so easily. I came to talk with you—yes, upon a serious question."

"Nothing so very terrible, I trust. You seemed changed in a measure since a little time."

"I am changed," replied Constance with a half smile; "changed so that I scarcely know myself. Father has spoken to you, has he not, of the reasons for postponing this—my marriage?"

The pastor nodded affirmatively.

"Sit down, Stany; I am listening."

"I suppose, uncle, you must have approved of my conduct in the matter?"

"Certainly I approve, and I admire you for living up to your duty, when your inclinations all push you against it."

"But is it really duty?"

"The words of our Saviour, as we read them in St. Matthew, seem to me very precise, and personally, I regret that they are not followed word for word. However——"

"However," said Stany quickly, "all the Protestants accept the decree of divorce."

"You mean to say that divorce is recognized in

all Protestant countries, although it is surrounded with more difficulties than the Catholics generally admit."

"And in France, uncle, since the law has been re-established?"

"In France there exists two factions among our pastors, so that our synods, in the face of so much opposition, have refrained from imposing an absolute rule; those who do not sanction the divorce are not compelled to recognize it in reuniting parties who have profited by it. This proves our spirit of freedom; respect for conscience is deeply rooted in our religion, but I believe that which is the most universally accepted will dominate the others. The French Church does not marry; since the marriage is a civil ceremony, there is no necessity for the Church meddling in the matter; two people who present themselves for our prayers are already married. Practically, I would not refuse my blessing except where I considered I had very just cause."

"And so far as M. de Glenne is concerned, there would be no just cause," said Stany quickly. "When we first met he had been separated from his wife for years for some very grave faults she had committed toward him. This new affection had in nowise served to disunite them. M. de Glenne was free, and I did not even know that he had ever been married."

The pastor nodded in sign of acquiescence.

"The more I think of it, the more it seems to me that M. de Glenne has the right to begin his life anew under these conditions. He would commit no wrong toward any one."

"From all I can hear that is quite true," interrupted M. Duranton. "He has nothing for which to reproach himself."

"Nothing," said Stany; "he is honor and goodness itself."

They fell into silence again, while the expression of the pastor's countenance seemed to question what this child could be leading up to.

"You admired me, uncle, for obeying my duty, rather than my inclinations; would it be possible to make them one and the same?"

The pastor rubbed his chin quizzically.

"Hum," he said; "I hardly see how you could arrange matters at Rome. She makes few concessions, and those only for princely interests."

"That is just the sort of concession that is revolting to me; it is what would give me courage to——" She stopped suddenly, quite overcome with what she was about to say. "Certainly I would never consent to a marriage where God had no part, and it is precisely of this that I wish to talk to you. I belong to a Protestant race, after all; the abjuration of my mother was merely an accident. I could return to the faith which has been that of my entire family, and obtain, from a faith less rigorous than the Catholic, the blessing which would stop all scandal and leave me in repose."

It seemed to her while she spoke that her heart beat wildly with the monstrosity of the idea she had scarcely given herself time to think out entirely, and her voice had died to the echo before the last words had left her lips; she raised her eyes timidly toward the pastor. The drops of perspi-

ration were standing in great beads upon his forehead and his hands were convulsively joined; he was looking at her as he would have looked at Marguerite twenty years before had she come to him and said: "I am coming back to my own faith." This child was just the age of his dear little lamb; she spoke with the same tones; she resembled Marguerite in everything, and the illusion had been so real for a moment that the pastor had lost sight of time, place and circumstances; he was in that cold parlor at Saint-Denis, and seeing Marguerite fading from him; he had seized her and brought her back to the God of their ancestors.

"You will be with us again—forever," he stammered.

"Yes, uncle, if you wish it?"

The pastor's big black eyes looked eagerly into the troubled, anxious face of his niece; suddenly he sighed deeply, passed his nervous fingers through his hair, started to his feet and walked heavily about the room, like a man trying to walk off the effects of an over-indulgence in wine. His face had seemed almost congested with redness a few moments before, and now he was pale and silent.

"You love each other very much," he said, taking Stany's hands in his.

His response had struck home; Stany covered her face with her hands, and her whole frame shook with sobs.

"My child," said the pastor with a majesty that came to him upon occasion and contrasted strangely with his usual bourgeoisie appearance; "my child, God knows I would give the years left me

of life to see you voluntarily return to the faith of your fathers, that you might believe as we do, but I cannot aid you in following a will-o'-the-wisp, in making a dupe of yourself. Are you sure you are not sacrificing your faith to a purely human idol? Is it not simply your own interests which brings you to me upon this mission? My dear child, we cannot deceive God. Look well into your own soul; reflect. If you come to me again in a few days and tell me that you are serious in this demand, I shall understand that I have misjudged you, and I shall thank God for that blessing as I have never thanked him for anything in this world."

She was still crying, disconcerted by his clairvoyance, humiliated to the bottom of her soul; for the pastor had placed his finger directly upon her spiritual cowardice.

"If, on the contrary, you never speak to me of it again—well, I shall keep the secret of this interview, and forget that you have come to speak with me of it, to ask me in a moment of folly to aid you in obscuring your conscience."

Stany took the big brown hand of her uncle and kissed it with veneration, with repentance, too. Madame Duranton entered at the same moment. When the pastor and his wife were alone he said to her:

"My dear, a strange thing happened to me during your absence. The spirit of falsehood offered me a kingdom if I would worship it."

"What do you mean by this parable?" asked Edelmone, who was a long ways from guessing the real truth. "If it came to matter of kingdoms or

profits I recognize you readily in the refusing of them."

"I refused," replied the pastor sadly, "but in truth I am almost sorry I did, and I hope the offer will be renewed."

"So long as it is not the devil who renews it," said Madame Duranton, still in the dark as to what he meant.

"That is the important point."

But Constance made no new attempt. She had thought that her uncle would hasten to meet her half way in the matter, and smooth out the difficulties for her; she had counted upon the pastor to silence those scruples she had been unable to silence alone. Instead, he had torn aside the veil with which she had sought to cover her intentions, and said: "We cannot deceive God," and she felt now that she could never succeed even in deceiving herself. She wrote M. de Glenne:

"I have done what I promised you. I have labored with all my strength to dispel what you termed 'phantoms'; I went to an extreme that I can scarcely comprehend now, but the end—for this is the end—is that these phantoms will not permit themselves to be dispelled; they are more real for me than all the rest of the world together. How shall I explain it to you? I believe it is impossible to explain this; we shall be obliged to pass over it. I should hate myself, I should be so miserable that you would be ten times more unhappy than now merely to see me. Forget me, since it is all that is left to us. I must bow to your resentment, even to your hate, but you must not seek to see me again. I scarcely feel at liberty

to tell you that the simplest arrangement would be to exile yourself again from your home, but you have the whole world before you, and I—I am chained to this little corner of the earth where my father is; I ask nothing more than to be allowed to remain with him. You are generous and you must decide upon what you consider the best, but I have one request and I make it in the name of the love I bear for you—that you will not seek to break through this resolution of mine; it is absolute. It would merely mean a redoubling of the suffering I am now enduring. Adieu.”

To this fragmentary letter that she had bathed in her tears, Monsieur de Glenne responded, as a man of the world in whom even the deepest grief cannot rob entirely of his *savior faire*:

“My dear little girl, you do not measure the harm you are doing, you cannot comprehend the bitterness you are inflicting; determined, as I am, never to grieve you, I shall obey you, cost what it will. If I were twenty years old, I would brave your resentment and throw myself at your feet, and perhaps the sight of me would disarm all your resolutions. I am no longer young enough to dare it; I have neither confidence in myself nor in my destiny; when I met you I thought I had lived through my part of pleasure on earth, and for a long time I persisted in deceiving myself as to the feeling I had for you. But it took complete possession of me, and opened a future of which I had scarcely dreamed in my wildest, most enthusiastic moments. It lasted but a brief space; you are leaving me poorer than you found me, leaving me more irritated than ever against the vain forms

of a religion which I already scorned. I think it must be denied to most men to grasp the subtleties of feminine thought, but fatality forces us to worship where we cannot comprehend. But it seems to me that were I in Stany's place I should have seen in this pretended crime an act of charity; the reconciling of an infidel, the leading back into the paths of righteousness the sinner who had strayed afar; there, indeed, was something to tempt you. Gratitude to God for the first blessing He would have conferred would have brought him back to the fold from whence he had wandered. You would have accomplished nothing but good, while now, perhaps, you are responsible for just the opposite. Pardon—I do not mean to menace you with unworthy thoughts, but I do not know what will become of me, now that you have withdrawn the support that had grown so sweet and so necessary to me. Do not reply to me that you are not thinking alone of this world; it is the Catholic in you that would prompt that, and I should feel that all women in this world were merely egotistical—thinking merely of their future, with no charity for the struggling sinner. Your soul is burdened with superstition that has been inculcated too long to be obliterated. How can you believe God capable of punishing a being for the one pure unselfish affection of this life? If He is so cruel, if you are to encounter a tyrant capable of punishing that which is the most meritorious, the most touching, in his creatures—pity,—would it not be better to brave all by living the life of love and resigning yourself to an eternity of punishment to expiate it? You would know

that he who loved you had been happy through you, really happy, snatched from the bitterness that was enveloping his soul—the bitterness that was rendering him bad and useless. But you prefer to cling to a false conception of duty. You forget that you are throwing over me, as over yourself, a funeral pall. Some day, perhaps, you will realize how your notions of right and wrong have been false, and that there exists no wrong except that which we do to others. I hope then you may not be filled with remorse for your hardness toward me. No matter when it is to come, I shall wait until the last hour for my pardon from you; it can come from nowhere else, for the condemned never resign themselves to death. We might have been so happy, Stany.”

“Happiness?” Raoul de Glenne still counted upon it. His letter might have struck a woman more experienced in the ways of the world as being too full of calculation, but it merely touched the vulnerable place in Stany, as he had expected it would. For a few moments she had been blinded by the reasons he had held up against her religion, but more, perhaps, by that final appeal which had quivered like an arrow in her heart; it meant intense agony to her, an agony worse than death. Doctor Vidal continued to watch her closely, and he felt that her resolution had never faltered once; she had decided upon the right.

“Mignonne, you must render me this justice; I have no wish to add to your suffering by remonstrating with you, but it costs me a great deal, as well as yourself—a great deal.”

"Dear papa," she said, embracing him, "are we not very happy together?"

"No, we are not happy; you are suffering constantly, and I am suffering because you are. I blame myself severely from beginning to end. I am entirely responsible for it all. I took the wrong road. I thought I was doing for the best. It is very difficult to understand you women. My desire was to see you married as you wished."

"Ah, papa, I have come back to my old way of thinking about marriage, and I am as opposed to it as I used to be—you remember? So nothing is so very different, after all."

"But when I shall no longer be here, little one? It is the greatest trouble I have, do you see, to leave you all alone——"

"You are not going to leave me, papa; you are young and vigorous. Are you afraid that when I shall be alone I will not know how to behave myself?"

"Wisely, I am not sure—but bravely, certainly. You make me think all the time of some poor devil who lies dying beside an open box full of gold with which to save himself from starvation, for I have eyes, although I say little. What gives you this courage? Hush, now you are going to answer with some foolishness."

He was silent a moment while Stany, seated upon his knees, with her arm about his neck, said:

"I do not merit all these praises; go ask Uncle Duranton."

"He ought to throw himself at your feet and ask pardon; he, a priest, who calls all that foolishness virtue. I call it all folly."

"What, the honesty that respects the bank notes?" interrupted Stany, smiling.

"No, I withdraw my comparison, for you already have the bank notes; that is where the line is drawn between honesty and folly."

"If they were really mine, legally mine, I would take them," she said, lowering her head.

"It is a mere absurdity that keeps you from it."

"We must be guided, papa, by what we feel and think. If I am wrong, you understand that it is certainly not to my credit or profit; but now you are scolding, it seems to me, and you were just flattering yourself a few moments ago——"

"I forget; it seems to take me out of myself. Forgive me, Stany. This brave fellow who loves you interests me; he interests me a great deal, but we can manage to live without him, I presume. If I could avoid seeing you melting away like wax in the fire! You are ill, my child, and ill of a disease against which I am powerless to help you, a trouble that is nameless, that is not in your body," said the doctor, relapsing into silence, while Stany watched him, with her heart palpitating with emotion, forgetting everything which did not comprise the hope she had cherished so long in regard to her father. It was a long silence while their hearts traveled the same highway. Finally the doctor said:

"A religion which has such a power over the heart of a child is a grand thing, after all."

"Oh, papa—you believe it? You see it now? If you might really believe it, I would be consoled for everything I have lost."

"I believe it; stop there, my dear. There are

many things to be upon our guard against. It is not to be despised, that is all. I believe in the power it has, the power averse to paternal authority, to reason and to love."

"No, papa; without that I know I should love you less—I know. Do not spoil what you have said, for it makes me so happy."

He drew her closer to him.

"If you might be, really, everything would be all the same to me. Listen, I believe in all the saints, all the time. Are you satisfied?"

"Ah, you would be less duped if you would only believe a little bit in God," cried Stany, laughing with real joy.

She felt that day that the recompense was not so far off, and that our every effort has a result oftentimes greater than we could even hope for. It is as impossible for us to measure the result of a bullet fired at random as to measure the result of a handful of wheat thrown to the four winds. Every act must bear its fruit, for good as well as for evil. Stany felt that while she was breaking her own heart, she was perhaps regaining the soul of her father and bringing him to God, and she was better equipped than ever against the pleadings of Raoul. She had other subjects to occupy her mind for the week following, and to keep her thoughts from the absent.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE late autumn was rainy and damp, as it usually is in Gascony, resulting in a great deal of illness. About the middle of December a case of diphtheria manifested itself in one of the remote farms of the neighboring parts, an isolated place lying near a little lake hidden beneath the pines. The epidemic reached the village, and several children were taken to the cemetery as a result. One of the younger members of La Pistolere's family was stricken; the doctor succeeded in saving this child and several others by multiplying himself, so to speak, acting first as doctor and then as nurse, for the parents, overcome and terrified by a malady of which they knew nothing, were unable to apply the remedies the doctor prescribed, exaggerating their usual helplessness in case of urgent need. The doctor visited the infested homes from morning to night, having forbidden Stany to enter one of them for fear of contracting the disease.

"Let me attend to it," he would say; "I am quite sufficient. An old person like me has nothing to fear—I am hardened; besides, I have the advantage of being a doctor, and doctors are invulnerable, you know."

Constance had begged to be permitted to share his hardships, but he had insisted upon her promising him not to disobey him in this matter. She

was reduced to waiting for him at the window until he would return from a day of hard work, worn out and harassed, with his face bearing the lines of suffering from the heartbreaking scenes he had witnessed during the day. Before he would permit Stany to come near him, he would hasten to change his garments, and take all the precautions necessary to avoid any possible contagion; then he would let her comfort and soothe him, glad that she had rebelled firmly against following out his instructions and seeking a refuge with the Durantons during the epidemic.

By a tacit understanding, neither the father nor daughter broached any painful subject during these few hours of repose and pleasure. Stany made every effort to amuse and hold her father's attention to take his mind from his work of the day. Sometimes he would draw her upon the subject of religion through a desire to analyze a remedy, the effects of which were so astonishing to him; he wanted to probe the matter and discover the ingredients. He would listen to her replies, her explanations, nodding his head with an indulgent smile, as if he were listening to childish fairytales, and he would laugh when she said to him:

"But, papa, you are a saint, whether you will or no, when you devote yourself entirely to charity. M. le Curé was carried away with you the other day when you were placing that bandage on poor little Jacquille de la Tapie. He thought you were so gentle, so patient. He said to me: 'Ah, why does your father not do that from love of the Lord? He would receive a worthy recompense.'"

The idea of a recompense made the doctor shrug his shoulders and laugh.

"I do that because it is my profession, and to count upon a compensation because I helped a poor little sufferer, who died in spite of me, would be exorbitant, besides, a crown would bother me a great deal. I do not look for any profits. You can tell your curé that I have no chance to be disappointed, so long as I expect nothing."

"And he will be capable of replying that perhaps you will receive a surprise."

"*A la bonne heure.* We shall see, but I think none the worse of it, that I am entirely disinterested in the little I can do."

"Very well; if you will not be a saint, you shall be a hero."

"I accept the compliment for all the physicians."

"And I, who am not a heroine when it comes to a question of my dear papa; I beg of him to call some physician to assist him."

"When I am too tired to do it all myself I will, I promise you. But I hope, all the same, that the epidemic will wear out before I do. A doctor who would shrink from the fatigue of it, would make me think of a soldier who loved his profession only in the time of peace. They have always been so well about here, it is very humiliating for me. I certainly must conduct myself properly in my first engagement."

What he called his first engagement was also to be his last. One night about Christmas time he came home particularly worn, and told Stany that she was right, after all; he intended to get some physician to assist him in his labors; he was

hardly able to go another day, which proved, after all, that old people were good for nothing; perhaps he had taken a little cold.^{Just} So that it was not this devil of a disease he was bringing into his own house; in such a case there was nothing for it but Stany must leave him entirely in the hands of Catinou. He would get well all the sooner for not having her to worry about. To himself he could but repeat, "I am done for." And as the fever crept over him more and more, he repeated mechanically words that Constance tried not to hear.

"I wish I could have left you in good hands, my child."

He never mentioned the subject again, knowing that the little one would have sorrow enough without aggravating it with useless complaints.

Stany disputed bravely with death for him, asking nothing better than to follow him if he could not stay with her, offering all her love in exchange for him, as if she were capable of tearing it from her heart. Then came the moment when her last hope took flight, when they had the courage to tell her, "Nothing can help him."

She prayed one night beside that bed where the sufferer was lying pale and breathless in an interval of calm. Suddenly, in looking at him in the grey light of the lamp, she saw him open his eyes and move his lips slightly. Was he joining in her prayer and murmuring words of tenderness? She wished to rise to reassure herself if it could be true, but a motion she could not misinterpret kept her upon her knees, praying for him to a God of whom he knew little.

It was that he had asked of her, for no sooner had she resumed her prayer than he seemed satisfied. He asked nothing more.

A sentiment of triumph had slipped into her heart; she was certain now that her sacrifice had not been in vain; it had struck the heart of this incredulous father as a proof of the aid God lends to the feeble to raise them above and beyond themselves; it had come to him as a miracle.

She halted now and again to press her lips to the hand she held in hers and to receive the encouragement of the slight pressure it was still capable of giving; she prayed aloud, pleading the cause of this man who had searched for truth all his life, who had never repulsed the sick, nor the suffering, nor the poor, and who had gone forth confidently, not knowing how near he was to the end of his voyage: nothing or eternity, but ready for either one. She was not weeping; her voice was firm and clear. The duty before her gave her a force she deemed miraculous. He lay very still, then she felt she dared ask him to have the priest, but she grew agitated and he murmured in reply:

“No, no; you alone.”

She knelt down again beside him. She served as humbly as she could at those last offices beside the dead, beside him who was going forth now to fathom that terrible mystery of eternity.

CHAPTER XX.

SIX weeks had passed since the doctor had been laid away beneath the ivy in the little cemetery, followed to his last resting place by all those brave peasants to whom he had devoted his life, and who lamented him as sincerely as if he had been their father.

Stany was a hundred times more desolate now than she had been the first day. The almost superhuman courage she had displayed during all that bitter trial had deserted her now it no longer served to comfort any one. Of what use could it be to deceive herself now. No one would suffer simply because she did, and she no longer imposed any restraint upon her feelings.

A lamentable reaction was taking possession of her; her energy, her will power had deserted her; even her faith had lost its ardor. It seemed to her she no longer had any place on earth except beside the newly-made grave, where her lusterless eyes read and reread the name of Philippe Vidal—that grave beside her mother. “Is it possible he lies there?” she would repeat to herself over and over again. “Is it possible he has gone to rejoin her? Where can they both be now? Do they know that I am left alone, desolate, mourning?”

All the truths she had been so zealous in pour-

ing into the soul of her father at the last seemed to elude her, now that she had such need of them. Perhaps her Aunt Edelmone was responsible for this in a measure, for she burdened her constantly with Old Testament exhortations, pouring them into her listless mind from morning to night; for the Duranton family, with the best intentions in the world, had made it their duty to be with Constance continually that she might not feel the loneliness of orphanage.

Her uncle had cordially offered her the hospitality of his home, hoping, perhaps, that the little interview they had had together would be renewed; but Constance dreaded that above all else, and perhaps she refused him for the same reason. She dreaded Madame Duranton, too, with her Bible, and the young Capdeveille household, who resigned themselves for an hour or two to being sad with her, only to return to their cooing with renewed vigor.

When Constance had succeeded in making her relatives understand that she preferred remaining at the Priourat, Madame had assured herself that there was no more diphtheria in the neighborhood and insisted upon sending the boisterous young Louison to keep her niece company for a week or so to distract her attention.

It is difficult to make people comprehend that a great sorrow is not to be lightly put aside, and that it is in solitude alone that we can familiarize ourselves with our suffering. The noise and mirth of young children about her was heartrending to Stany at this period.

We have all experienced the misery of it, and

yet we continue to crowd about those we love when their misfortune comes in turn.

She was forced to forget that Madame de Latour-Ambert could not tolerate her father during his life-time, for that lady wrote beautifully of him, now that he had passed away, but she offered plausible, if not strictly truthful, excuses for not seeking a refuge with her godmother in this time of grief.

The one mark of sympathy which would have found an echo in her heart did not come. Raoul de Glenne continued to observe that silence which she had taken at first as a respectful submission to her wishes, but which such a sudden and unlooked-for catastrophe might have warranted him in breaking. Constance had addressed a mourning announcement to him herself. This insensibility to her sorrow was another cause for grief to her, and when death had robbed her of her only support and counselor, she turned voluntarily toward that other affection she had voluntarily repulsed, scarcely knowing which of her two burdens was causing her the greatest grief. To be forgotten is worse than death.

As the dismal, mournful, winter day slowly spent itself, she sat alone at the fireside that the season before had been one witness of the happiest days of her life—those days in her father's study with him and Raoul. How often, when the rain and wind beat against the window panes, did her wretched solitude force itself upon her with renewed agony! Mechanically she would arrange the chairs as they had sat the season before, while the flickering pine logs threw their shadows

against the desk where her father had been wont to sit and work. It was left in its habitual disorder; a pile of papers lay immovable beneath the paper-weight; his scientific books arranged methodically upon the shelf, were growing dusty from solitude, for no one disturbed them now, and the pipe that he smoked continually lay upon the desk, empty and cold.

No matter, it was the same frame, and Stany saw the picture of the past within it, and lived those times over until she forgot the present. She lingered lovingly upon every detail, recalling every word, every subject they had discussed, recalling, too, every look that had passed between her and the stranger who sat at the right of the hearth. She remembered the weary, dragging hours that had separated these nights from one another; she had lived only for those evenings, and at the time they had seemed weeks apart. To anticipate, to believe in her future, was a thing of the past for her now. Must she, indeed, always live in this tomb with these shadows? Sometimes her mind reverted to the Abbé Eudes, and she thought of going to him that he might direct her to that religious life that her mother had contemplated; it would teach her the repose and the beauty of the convent life. Then, again, she seemed to grow feverish and to feel the necessity of action; in her thoughts she followed all those voyages she had followed the winter before in this little study, when her father and de Glenne had talked over his wanderings upon the earth, but they all terminated sorrowfully in Italy.

One night she was pursuing these mental vaga-

bond tours, with her feet upon the fender before the fire and her little figure buried in the depths of the armchair, when the dogs aroused her with their furious barking. Some one knocked at the outer storm doors. Then she thought Catinou was holding a whispered conversation in the corridor. Who could be coming so late? She straightened herself up to hear, when Catinou entered, her features distorted with a half smile and a touch of alarm, too, and bending over her to whisper, as if she thought she was making the situation less tense, she said:

“Do not be afraid, *ma petite*, it is he.”

Strange as it seemed to Constance, she felt every emotion but surprise; the strangeness of it to her had been that he should have waited so long.

Raoul had followed Catinou into the room almost timidly. She extended her little white hand to him, and the two stood for a moment without speaking. They seemed to feel it strange that they should each look as they always had; that after such an absence there should be so little alteration, although Stany did indeed seem very thin and pale beneath her heavy crape, and his face was drawn with the lines of fatigue, for he had but just left the train, not having even taken the time to go to the Park and freshen himself after his fatiguing journey.

“My poor little child!” he said tenderly.

“Is it really you at last,” she answered, with tears in her voice.

He felt it was almost a reproach she was uttering. At all events he hastened with his excuses; he had made all the haste possible; only the night

before when he returned from a long trip in Sicily, had he learned of the terrible news. He had left word in Florence to forward all his letters, and as none of them were ever from her, he felt more and more that their separation was to be eternal, and had lingered in his travels even more than he had expected when he left Italy. As fate would have it, the announcement of her father's death had not been forwarded, but lay in his room amidst a pile of journals and newspapers. Her dear handwriting had appeared before him surrounded with black; he reproached himself for not having felt that she needed him, that she was suffering, when he had had no word from her. His voice was choked with tears, too—he, who had not wept since his childhood, which he had forgotten. She had never seen her father weep, and the sight of Raoul, who had loved the doctor, overcome in this way with emotion, touched her so profoundly that she laid her head upon his shoulder and cried, too; cried as she had not done since the day they had laid the doctor away, for the relaxation of weeping had been denied her; her grief had been tearless and tragic. Their sorrow was mutual and sincere, and for the moment left place for no other emotion. Raoul had put his arm around her as if he would protect her forever from the bitterness of life. For an hour or more they spoke of the doctor and their sorrow in the losing of him, their dearest friend, recalling all his charity, all the sympathy for his friends, all the sublime unselfishness he had displayed before his death.

“You knew him so well,” Stany said.

“And he knew me well also,” said Raoul; “he

would willingly have called me son. I believe that if he could manifest his wishes now, it is to me he would confide the task of caring for you. Will you not obey him, Stany?"

She drew herself away from him slightly, recalled to the present by the question of her own future. "Papa understands, where he is now, a great deal that he would not understand while he lived—he sees—he knows. To have seen you now is the greatest consolation I could have had, but it is a consolation that must not be renewed."

"*Cherie*, what are you saying? I will remain at the Park, invisible, if you wish, but awaiting your first appeal, to serve you either as a friend or brother. You must not deny me the privilege of living for you—at a distance if you wish—without importuning you."

She looked into his eyes calmly, for she knew that a relationship such as that would be impossible between them, although his words were spoken with sincerity.

"If I said 'yes,' what do you think the to-morrow would be like? Do not delude yourself, or me. I know what we should be for one another, and it must be all or nothing."

"No matter what you do, you shall be all mine to the last," said Raoul impetuously.

He knelt down beside her, "Stany, why make us both so miserable? God does not ask such sacrifices of us, even the God you think so implacable and jealous. He knows that we cannot live without each other. Even if He should punish me for having been so foolish and thoughtless as a young man, there is no reason why He should chastise

you, who have never known what wrong is. Believe me, He would favor me for your sake; He would permit me to protect you against the ill winds; He does not wish you to push me to curse and deny Him. If you will consent, Stany, I will become a Christian as you are; I will walk in the paths that you shall point out; you can save me in this world and the world to come."

He spoke in the language he thought she would understand the best as a mother would speak with her child.

"Save you," she said in a vibrating voice; "you mean I would condemn us both."

"And if that should be true, even if it could be true, you do not love as I do, or you would be willing to accept that sacrifice; you would not fear it or speak in such a way of our separation."

"I would rather die," she said, so low that he could scarcely distinguish her words, "than condemn us to the suffering such a breach of faith would entail once we came to a full understanding of our real situation."

"It is adieu, then, adieu for now and for always that you mean, Stany. Good by, my love."

"Adieu," she murmured almost inaudibly.

He took her in his arms and pressed her close to his heart; it was the last caress he was to take from those lips; he was giving up his future, his love, his life in this last kiss.

"Absence shall not separate us," she said. "You shall be with me in thought each day, each hour, for I know now that you really love me better than aught in this world, since you are willing to obey me in this sacrifice. Adieu."

He obeyed her gesture and left the house mechanically, while she fell into the chair she had occupied when he had roused her from her reverie a few short hours before. Catinou found her there, late in the night, silent, immovable, with her eyes set upon the empty fireplace before her, and her thoughts speeding away with the traveler, God knew where.

Raoul lingered in the neighborhood for days, hoping she would recall him, trusting to her heart to call him back. He even attempted to see her again, but this time Catinou presented the incorruptible figure of Cerberus. He grew ashamed, after a little, and kept, with a great effort, the promise he had given.

Through the countryside gossip ran riot about his return and speedy departure. Every one believed he had come to marry Mlle. Vidal and that she had refused him. A number thought her very foolish to refuse such a chance of happiness. The pastor and the curé, each in their turn, recalled that this sort of folly was always termed fanaticism; others preferred to think the request had never been seriously made; others, a little better informed, said that she had discovered M. de Glenne was a bigamist, and the prejudice against Parisians grew in proportion. What was apparently incomprehensible to all was that a young girl of twenty would voluntarily resign herself to a living grave in the Priourat.

Constance, however, continued to remain there, to the frequently expressed anger of her god-mother. She gave herself over to the charity she had begun during her father's lifetime, and in a

measure grew contented with the lot she had chosen for herself.

Her beauty grew more spiritual with the years, and her character more firm and self reliant. But one thing had served to turn down a page of life since that evening when she had bidden adieu to all that she cherished in this world; that had been a strange paragraph in one of the newspapers she had opened several years later—a paragraph beginning with the name of Madame Frederike de Lebenberg, the divorced wife of M. Raoul de Glenne, announcing her marriage with some foreigner, and she thought sadly that nothing prevents the wicked from reaping a harvest from every misdeed.

Of late a new sign has appeared upon the gates of the Park, bearing the inscription:

“Property for Sale.
Address the Rev. M. Durantou, Rue de Sully,
Nerac.”

Perhaps, however, there is some secret understanding between the pastor and the proprietor, who still counts upon the intervention of Providence; or perhaps, for some other reason, no purchaser has presented himself, so Constance Vidal goes almost daily to walk beneath the stately trees that sheltered her when she was young, and that are still to shelter her when she is old, and to commune with all that is left to her of pleasure in this world.

THE END.

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